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Lost Soldiers from Lost Wars:
A Comparative Study of the Collective
Experience of Soldiers of the Vietnam War
and the Angolan/Namibian Border War

by
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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Gretchen B. Rudham Signature

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I explore the Vietnam War and the Border War of South Africa through the analysis of the oral histories of the soldiers who fought in these wars. Considering the scarcity of oral histories about the Border War, I conducted several personal interviews with Border War soldiers to add to the oral histories representing that conflict. In this dissertation, I frame the accounts of South African conscripts and Vietnam soldiers within the appropriate historical, social and ideological contexts of both wars. This comparison further focuses on the soldiers' perspective with relation to the physical and psychological conditions endemic to fighting guerilla wars, issues of race, class, ethnicity or regional affiliation in combat, as well as the return home from lost wars of intervention. My evaluation discovers significant common ground between the physical demands of warfare, the social and political environment, and most importantly, similar expressions of mental and emotional strain both during guerilla warfare and upon returning home. In conclusion, this is an endeavor to contribute to the breaking of the silence that has pervaded and enclosed the Border War by using, as a comparative point of departure, the vast experiences of Vietnam veterans who were more readily allowed the space to voice their accounts.

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Preface

I sit here in extreme comfort with the potent perspective of hindsight. I can read about murder, dismemberment, mutilation, disembowelment, and loss – I can hear how it feels to see a friend and comrade blown to pieces by a Bouncing Betty, and what it does to one's mind picking up the pieces of what was once a fellow soldier. And then I can (sometimes) switch off the lights and not worry about nightmares, sleeplessness, or anxiety. I can research about how it feels to be cast aside as a returning soldier from a lost war, and then carry on with own my life plans unhindered, while some soldiers are paralyzed by an inability to cope and bear the burden of their nation's and their own personal guilt, shame and anger. Perhaps it is my own brand of survivor's guilt, somehow transmitted into my psyche through research-induced osmosis. I can vividly imagine what it is like to walk on night patrol in Vietnam or how it feels to go on a mission in a Casspir through the Ovamboland bush. But if I do not know first hand what it is to be soldier in war, does this somehow discredit or disqualify my comparison? I struggle with the issue of belonging in a soldier's private space of recording and remembrance. What expertise can I claim, since recording and comparing oral histories of war requires me to meld many job descriptions - historian, soldier, military strategist, terrorist, politician, philosopher, psychologist all in one.

My strong interest in war, death and destruction goes back to early school days, where I was constantly under surveillance for my 'inappropriate' and macabre fascinations with Hitler and the Holocaust, animal dissection and terminal illnesses. My politics have been left-wing from an early age, and I am quite used to having my interests or insights disturb teachers from primary school to college professors. My interest in the Vietnam Era also began long ago and was cemented when I took a Vietnam history class in my undergraduate years. I was intently drawn to the Vietnam War after forming a very close and special bond with an extraordinary veteran named Dain Lozier. He was at one time my boss, and thereafter became my roommate. He was a helicopter pilot who, during his second tour of duty, survived being shot down and shot nine times and left for dead by

the VC. He mesmerized me with his pictures and his memories from the war and recuperation in Guam. I continue to marvel at his approach to life as well as his endless capacity for giving. Dain gave the Vietnam veteran a face – a tangibility that has never left me. This now brings me to South Africa. (Ironically, Dain introduced me to Darren, my South African husband – which makes him the ultimate godfather of this project). Marrying Darren and moving to Cape Town over two years ago certainly informs the perspective from which I write this dissertation. I had (and still retain) an intimate and vested interest in discovering the workings and history of my new home; it is fair to say that my American perspective is quite different to a typical study abroad semester experience.

Conveniently, my dissertation topic was the love child of my second semester Masters coursework – a Vietnam film class and a class in the comparative history of the US and SA. My reawakened personal connection with the Vietnam War suddenly melded by way of comparison to the South African Border War. So naturally, as my previous experience had informed me, I needed to talk to the veterans to get the ‘real story’. This led me to the MOTHS (Memorable Order of Tin Hats) and the February 2nd Border Campaign Memorial Service honoring Border War veterans. This is where I first spoke with Border War veterans of many different ages, walks of life and war experience and collected photos, stories and, luckily for me, contact details. The MOTHS and their friends whom I have met through this process have gone out of their way to guide, inform and encourage me. I met other soldiers through part-time work, and through neighbors and friends who were aware of my topic. It is amazing how many people were directly or indirectly affected by the Border War – whether it was an uncle, brother, neighbor or boyfriend who served. My interviews over the period from February until June 2003 were crucial to this dissertation. The information I gained from these personal interviews was invaluable, and I was able to fill in a lot of the gaps left open in the few oral histories from a Border War soldier perspective. I conducted seven interviews in total, but only chose to focus on three of these interviews for this dissertation. Seven interviews cannot possibly tell the whole story, but is an attempt at realizing that possibility. The scope of a

mini-dissertation was limiting, and I chose the three interviewees based on the extent and diversity of their experience. The first veteran I interviewed served as a chef, completed intelligence courses, and did various township duties and camps, and he was also very versed in Vietnam literature. I liken him to my Public Relations officer. The second veteran served as an attachment to the 32-Battalion late in the war, and the third interviewee was a Lieutenant who went from officer training to commanding Angolan troops in Namibia.

My focus has changed drastically since the first inception of this dissertation. At first, I wanted to concentrate on the return home and rehabilitation of veterans (now Chapter Five). At one stage, I had hoped to narrow my scope to only black and so-called ‘Coloured’ soldiers from both wars, and the experience of brother fighting against brother (now Chapter Four). I had scheduled interviews with contacts from the MK and POQO, but these men were extremely diffident about coming forward and voicing their story. They feared the repercussions of going against the now ruling party, the ANC. Similarly, I found that the SADF white veterans whom I interviewed were equally reticent about disclosing information and their identity. Rumors of another TRC being conducted, made them hesitant to divulge certain anecdotes to me. Thus, I became inspired to try to tell a more comprehensive story, and this is when I tackled the encompassing story of veterans of both Vietnam and the Border Wars. This proved to a very challenging endeavor, as I placed the oral histories that I read and the stories that I gathered into an appropriate political and social context.

At first, I wondered how South Africans would relate to me – a stranger, a foreigner – trying to uncover their stories. But I actually found that being an American woman running around with a tape recorder and sharing beers, was a distinct advantage. The veterans could not classify me in terms of South African region, language, class or political agenda. Of course, I come with my own politics and background, but my perspective on Africa is formed and informed daily – my interactions shape my politics

about the legacy of apartheid, and South African civil strife and stereotypes. I have a good base from which to try and comprehend the viewpoints of both the SADF and of the ANC and MPLA; and, studying America's Vietnam War from the vantage of South Africa, I am afforded the distance to clearly comprehend the motivations, strategies and mistakes made by both Ho Chi Minh and my United States government and military alike. Yet, as a woman who will never fully understand the notion of mandatory national service, conscription or an implemented draft, is it possible for me to understand the John Wayne syndrome that so many soldiers talk of? Can I fully appreciate how war can challenge and cement a soldier's manhood as well as steal his innocence and youth all in the same moment? I do not innately connect with John Wayne or Rambo bravado, and perhaps this qualifies me as more able to filter out the exaggeration and self-delusion in tales of war.

I believe that the answer to all of these questions lies in the fact that I am at one level just a human being interested in facilitating a story. By using the oral histories that tell (part of) the story of Vietnam as a model, I want to allow a space of remembrance for the untold story – a space for the silent burden of so many South African Border War soldiers to be lifted. It is my biggest asset that I *do not belong* on many levels. I have the luxury of both hindsight and distance, and with this rich vantagepoint, I propose to compare two undeclared, unresolved, lost wars of intervention and insurgency. I am interested in the soldiers who fought in them, and the special and unique bond that soldiers form in combat which goes beyond any experience of romantic love, loyalty, ingrained beliefs or notions of racism. In addition, I seek to discover the shared, common ground between soldiers from two wars fought in separate decades and different continents (Vietnam War and the South African Border War).

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I am forever indebted to my parents Larry and Sheila for their never-ending emotional and financial support and all the many books they carried across the sea for me. I would like to award an honorary degree to my husband Darren, for his undying nurturing of my

vision, his patience, encouragement, editing and willingness to chat with me about war well into many nights. A very special acknowledgement to my supervisor Lesley Marx, for without all of her continued guidance, support and invaluable insight, I would still be wandering lost. Thanks to Rolf Wolfswinkel for his expertise and input, and to Cathi Draper for her helpful advice. I am grateful to countless others who aided along the way, especially my fellow Masters students for their endless encouragement. I would like to extend a very warm appreciation to all the soldiers who were so open and honest in telling their stories and who proved to be extremely encouraging and inspiring for me.

Notes to the Reader

- * The names of sources are encoded so as to protect the identity of soldiers interviewed who all wished to remain anonymous.
- * Both American and South African spelling conventions have been implemented interchangeably throughout my dissertation, which is due to the nature of comparing oral histories of two separate nations.
- * Italics are used for quotations that appear *in italics* in the original source
- * Due to the problematic nature of how oral histories are compiled and presented, there are many quotations throughout my dissertation that belong to unnamed soldiers or sources. Some soldiers in such oral histories are named, whereas some are not indicated. For consistency, I have implement the term 'qtd in' to signal that it is not the authors themselves that have stated the information, but rather a soldier or expert they interviewed or encountered. In a few instances where I deemed necessary, I specifically named the original source or person quoted.

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List of Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress of South Africa
APLA	Azanian People's Liberation Army
ARVN	Army of South Vietnam
BOSS	Bureau for State Security
ECC	End Conscription Campaign
FAPLA	People's Armed Forces for Liberation of Angola –MPLA's military wing
FNG	Fucking New Guy
FNLA	National Front for the Liberation for Angola
MK	<i>Umkhonto we Sizwe</i> (Spear of the Nation)
MPLA	Peoples Movement for the Liberation of Angola
NP	National Party of South Africa
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress of South Africa
POQO	Original armed wing of the PAC
SACC	South African Coloured Corps
SADF	South African Defence Force
SANDEF	South African National Defence Force (after 1994 election)
SWA	South West Africa
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa
UNITA	National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola
VC	Viet Cong
VVAW	Vietnam Veterans Against the War

INTRODUCTION

War poses all the hard philosophical questions about life and death and morality and demands immediate answers. The abstractions of scholarly debate become the very concrete matters of survival. In one short year, Vietnam took the measure of a man and of the culture that put him there. War strips away the thin veneer applied slap-dash by the institutions of society and shows Man for exactly what he is. We must listen closely to the men and women who became both the victims and the perpetrators of the war, if we want to learn something real about this particular conflict, something real about the human spirit, something real about ourselves

- Mark Baker, *Nam* xvi

One wonders if there is any merit in reopening or prodding wounds that have left scars on individuals as well as the collective consciousness of entire nations? Is this the best road forward, a road to an enlightened understanding, to reestablishing the truth, and a more honest look at our country and ourselves – or just a futile exercise in pain, reticence, disrespect or bad taste? One soldier asserted that “[t]he war took my measure. Not just me, but me and my culture. The culture had given me a framework, a point of reference for understanding myself, my religion and my parents, my background and all. And I was not that person” (qtd. in Baker 196). If war is a measure of the country and the individual soldier at war, then what did both Vietnam and the Border Wars reveal in their measurements? There are very pertinent, universal and underlying lessons to be learned from those soldiers who fought and survived undeclared, unresolved and lost wars of intervention. These soldiers were forced to confront the shortcomings of mankind as well as their own nation, and the wisdom which is endemic to their perspectives is lost, buried, and along with their stories, sealed with shame. These soldiers battled under unique circumstances, experienced a novel amount of psychological pressure in guerilla war, only to return home with minimal recognition or acknowledgement of whom and what they sacrificed to survive. This silence is detrimental not only to the individuals who bear the weight of the disgrace, regret and guilt of an entire nation – this burden of silence damages the nation as a whole. Nations, like individuals, require healing and facing the collective responsibility of what nations owe their forgotten and displaced soldiers is perhaps one redemption found in revisiting and reassessing lost wars of the past.

Vietnam and the Border Wars were both seen as lost conflicts and somehow immoral or evil to the point of contagion. “People didn’t want to know about the tumults of the warrior’s heart, to hear the cries that came howling straight out of the heart of darkness, the belly of the beast. Both sides of the Vietnam debate in the United States shared a suspicion, at times a contemptuousness, of the veteran” (Caputo 349). This “myth of the bad, immoral war” dictated the way both America and South Africa received the returned soldier (Wolfswinkel 175). “The country didn’t give a shit about the guys coming back, or what they’d gone through. The feeling toward them was, ‘Stay away – don’t contaminate us with whatever you’ve brought back from Vietnam’ ”(qtd. in Karnow 27). A South African soldier highlights the silence that still surrounds the Border Wars: “It’s not talked about, nobody talks about it. It happened, that is just the way we did it. *So wrong*” (PB). This transference onto the returning soldier of all the blame, shame, regret, guilt, failure or disenchantment associated with the defeat in both wars was perhaps even more damaging than the traumas they incurred in combat.

The social, political and economic complications of the return home compounded the already overwhelming repercussions of enduring guerilla war conditions. The Vietnam conflict and the Border War in Angola and Namibia¹ are in the past, where many people feel they belong, buried. “Yet many veterans feel themselves to be members of a dislocated generation, their place in the society uncomfortable, undefined, almost embarrassing – as if the nation has projected onto them its own sense of guilt or shame or humiliation for the war” (Karnow 25). There is no way to alter history, but it is never too late to create or allow a safe space for our silenced soldiers to tell their stories.

South Africa’s Border War veterans grappled with an even more dauntingly complicated

¹ A South African territory since 1920, Namibia was known as South West Africa (SWA) until its independence in 1989, but I have used Namibia to refer to SWA before and after independence for the sake of simplicity.

return home. The fall of apartheid compounded the sense of shame, blame and complexity of trying to assimilate back into civilian life. Border War veterans are trapped between two regimes, which ensures and enables only further reticence in speaking about the war. *"While many of the conscripts referred to here do not differentiate their anger to the old or the new regime, some focused intensely on their sense of being abandoned by their old leaders. The old society did not provide for any process of reintegration and failed to acknowledge their sacrifice. The new society condemns them as perpetrators, as defenders of apartheid"* (TRC 4: 241). Veterans of both wars experienced an unjust lack of welcome home. Vietnam was the war everyone wanted to immediately wipe from America's consciousness, and similarly, the stories which emerge from the Border War "...[tell] of a conflict that the world regarded as unpopular and unjust and in which South Africa was perceived as the aggressor" (Breytenbach, *Buffalo* 13). The disconnection from past and present characterized South Africa during and after the conflict in Angola and Namibia; as one soldier explains, "Back in South Africa we had been so effectively chloroformed that even a war had largely been kept from our consciousness" (Feinstein 65). Vietnam veterans felt disconnected, isolated and lonely just as the South African soldiers came home to silence, disapproval, rejection and even disdain. For many returning soldiers, " '[t]he pain and the loneliness were shallow complaints compared to finding yourself stripped of all entitlement to reputation, love or honor at home' " (qtd. in Karnow 655).

This sense of unspoken shame transforms the soldier into a lost or displaced soldier. Inevitably, "...after every war a period of silence closes down over the memory of it, it seems as if the survivors of the war are tired or embarrassed of hearing about it and want to get on with their lives, at least try to get on with it" (Wolfswinkel 173). This legacy of imposed silence begs the question, exactly what does a nation owe its soldiers?

"Different veterans bear different grievances. Some want more assistance, improved counseling, better jobs... Above all, they seem to be seeking respect and justice – the debt that nations owe their soldiers. Monuments and parades and requiems may not be enough" (Karnow 27). For some, it may seem too late for their nation to feign interest,

and simply breaking the silence may prove to be extremely insufficient. Maybe re-opening and reliving the pain is just another way for the nation to repeat the unbalanced cycle of collectively taking advantage of its soldiers – the nation needs you again, but this time to educate and correct misconceptions about the past. Yet, for many, breaking the silence may be a long-awaited starting point. For, as it stands now, there is a very distinct divide between soldiers who find solace and community within tight circles of fellow soldiers and the public who remains predominately in the dark about Vietnam or the Border War:

It is the side of war nobody likes to talk or even think about, the divide between those who were there and those who were not. It is what soldiers want to protect their families at home from, the knowledge of what really happens in battle, but at the same time this decision to remain silent makes it impossible for the folks at home to become a partner in their suffering. And so the void remains: those who know, don't talk; those who talk, don't know. (Wolfswinkel 173)

This dissertation endeavors to breach this divide, and perhaps bridge the chasm between the soldiers that the nation so callously lets get 'lost' and the nation who owes its forgotten and silenced soldiers a certain debt.

The young men who kept each other alive during the conflicts continue to rely on a unique brand of camaraderie or fellowship to survive. If the relationship between lost soldier and nation remains unsalvageable, perhaps at least one can learn many lessons from the enduring bond formed between men who face the tragedies and triumphs of wars of insurgency. "Under fire the strangest kinds of camaraderie would develop. It had nothing whatsoever to do with patriotism. It did have a great deal to do with taking care of each other. Because when you're out there, politics notwithstanding, the basic idea is to stay alive, and in a situation where we were fighting an unconventional war, which confused most of us, the main point was to stay alive" (qtd. Santoli 72). The story that needs to be told is not just about the political environment, the disparity in ideologies, propaganda and reality – but the human side of the machine of war. Soldiers from both Vietnam and the Border Wars "...were fighting in the cruelest kind of conflict, a people's war. It was no orderly campaign, as in Europe, but a war for survival waged

in a wilderness without rules or laws; a war in which each soldier fought for his own life and the lives of the men beside him, not caring who he killed in that personal cause or how many or in what manner..." (Caputo 229).

The Vietnam War and the Border War are both conflicts surrounded by controversy, inconsistency, and for some, a burden of silence and shame. They marked the advent of a new type of war, a war of insurgency and intervention that created a mold unlike any world wars that came before. The challenge in comparing Vietnam and the Border Wars is the disparity in sources. In essence, I am comparing a history that has been written in the case of Vietnam to a history about the Border War that has yet to be fully documented. *"This is a part of history, which has never been recorded fully yet. A history which – as far as the public at large is concerned – has not produced any heroes. Most of them are never mentioned. There were many situations, which are retold between individuals. Situations of heroism, which have to be judged from the point of view of that war. Those stories are buried away deeply..."* (qtd. in Wolfswinkel 176).² In addition, the types of histories written about both wars are oral, either written by one soldier or a collection of excerpts or quotes from interviews compiled into an oral history. One can view some of these histories as problematic, in that historical fact is presented as a series of anecdotes or stories that can be a mixture of fact, fiction and exaggeration. But who checks footnotes in the jungles of Vietnam or in the African bush? One approach is to look for patterns of recall or repetitions of memory in oral histories and to try and judge which accounts appear plausible.

This dissertation will seek to find patterns between accounts of both Vietnam and the Border Wars by taking note of both the similarities and differences in the ideologies at the core of these two wars, as well as both the physical *and* psychological conditions endemic to guerilla warfare, the issues of race and class as they relate to combat and

² Alexander Strachan, *'n Wereld sonder Grense*, trans. Chris van der Merwe and Rolf Wolfswinkel (Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1984) 68.

motivations for war, and the repercussions and realities of the return home for soldiers. Think of this as an invitation to soldiers of both wars to keep their nation human, by relating the human dimension and the secret and silent bond and legacy of lost soldiers. Simply because it is necessary:

At the very beginning of Western civilization, it was the role of the battle singers, who sang their verse around the warriors' guttering fires, to wring order and meaning out of the chaotic clash of arms, to keep the tribe human by providing it with models of virtuous behavior – heroes who reflected the tribe's loftiest aspirations – and with examples of impious behavior that reflected its worst failings.

Vietnam was fought with M-16s and helicopters instead of swords and steeds, but the battle singer's task was the same. The nature of the war made it exceptionally difficult: How to find meaning in such meaningless conflict? How to make sense out of a succession of random fire-fights that achieved nothing? How to explain our feelings? And what heroes could be found in a war so murky and savage? Yet the task was necessary. (Caputo 355)

Chapter One

IDEOLOGY: Communism, Christianity, Exceptionalism, Colonialism, and Apartheid

The Vietnam War was fought under the auspices of defending America and the rest of the World from Communism. But it was fought thousands of miles from US soil. The Border War was fought in neighboring countries to South Africa, so the proximity of the threat may have seemed closer as was the perceived Communist danger. It is also important to note that while both the US and South Africa were waging these wars supposedly against Communism, there were elements of war and strife at home. “In those days the border was pretty much on the border of the country. Now the border goes all over the place. Sometimes straight through the middles of families...” (Forces’ Favourites 70-71). There was a war being waged at home in America, with the Civil Rights Movement and assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy, as well as race riots and widespread demonstrations. In South Africa, there was a civil war being waged – black majority against white minority rule. Desmond Tutu, in his introduction to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report stated:

Some held very firmly to the view that South Africa was facing a total onslaught from the Communist empire and its surrogates, and believed that they were constrained to defend South Africa against what they perceived as an atheistic, unchristian foe. Others believed, equally vehemently, that the enemy was not out there; that the border was here in our midst, that certain things happened in waging wars that were thought to be totally necessary – things that must make us all hang our heads in shame. (4: 220)

Communism and the Cold War

“We are fighting...

To protect Southern Africa against Russian colonialism and oppression

To protect freedom of worship and speech

To protect our families and friends

For peace” - leaflet printed on back of old South African flag given to conscripts (WC)

The first and most vital comparison between Vietnam and the Border Wars is the Cold War-era ideology behind waging these two wars and the reasons given from a political and ideological standpoint. One Vietnam veteran said, in hindsight, that “[t]he hardest

thing to come to grips with was the fact that making it through Vietnam – surviving – is probably the only worthwhile part of the experience. It wasn't going over there and saving the world from Communism or defending the country. The matter of survival was the only thing you could get any gratification from" (qtd. in Baker 292-93). Was survival the only true collective experience for the soldier in both wars? A South African soldier claimed, "*You know democracy is a wonderful thing, but you cannot eat it and it doesn't keep you warm in winter*" (qtd. in TRC 4: 225). It doesn't really matter what your motives are or who your neighbors may be when you are being attacked in your sleep. Whether in the jungles of Vietnam or the bush of Angola/Namibia, survival becomes paramount. Ideologies don't make a body bag any more comfortable.

Nevertheless, ideologies were a major factor in both wars, and a staunch anti-Communist stance was continually exaggerated and used to justify involvement in both Vietnam and Angola/Namibia. America and South Africa both maintained that while fighting in Vietnam, Angola and Namibia, the real enemy was Communism, rather than the Viet Cong or the Peoples Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) or the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO). "By the 1980's, the region [South Africa] has become an arena of cold war confrontation. For the leadership of the government and the SADF, the war in Angola and the other conflicts across the region were good and just wars, part of the West's resistance to a perceived Soviet global offensive" (TRC 2: 43). Similarly, after the Cuban Missile Crisis, Americans had no trouble believing that Vietnam was another step in preventing an arms race or nuclear disaster. "Vietnam, as I was told and as I read at the time, was about us trying to prevent the Domino Theory, you know, the Communists taking South Vietnam and then the Philippines and marching across the Pacific to Hawaii and then on to the shores of California" (qtd. in Terry 156). Whether it was the perceived threat of 'the domino effect' of China and Russia in South East Asia, or the Communist Bloc countries taking control in Africa through black majority rule, either way, it was the intense fear of world domination by Communists. Americans and South Africans alike believed that Communism's "...aim is nothing less than world domination" (Andrew 80). Therefore, a comparison of both wars must be

explored within the context of the “...anti-Communist zeal of the cold war, in which the West was seen to be engaged in an effort to stem an encroaching and creeping Communism” (TRC 2: 7).

South Africans considered themselves allied with the West in this common conflict with Communism. “The South African government drew on Cold War theories to argue that its opposition to local liberation movements with Soviet sympathies or links was part of the same battle that the US and Western Europe were waging against Eastern Europe and the USSR” (TRC 2: 16). South Africa pointed to the Cold War politics to justify the “government’s perception of a link between Communism and the struggle against white domination” (2: 7). Thus, the war waged over the South African border as well as the war waged within South African borders against black liberation movements such as the African National Congress (ANC) or Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) were all explained in terms of stopping the surge of Communism. “As the last line of defence against Communism in the African sub-continent, the country was the bastion of western civilization. White South Africans were stepping into the breach to withstand Communist encroachment as the Americans had (unsuccessfully) done in Vietnam” (Baines 160). While the US rationalized involvement in Vietnam’s civil war as halting Communist world takeover, South Africa used a fear of Communist domination to justify a war both within and without South African borders. In South Africa, the fear of Communism “entrenched the National Party (NP) government’s perception of a link between Communism and the struggle against white domination” (TRC 2: 7). The South African government ensured its people and conscripted forces, that they were protecting their country from the Communists. The general ideology behind intervention in Vietnam or Angola/Namibia is similar, yet there is an important difference in the way in which South Africa implemented anti-Communist ideology. For the NP in South Africa, “...the enemy within the country – ‘*die swart gevaar*’ (black danger) – had made common cause with the enemy without – ‘*die rooi gevaar*’ (red danger)-” (Wolfswinkel 173). The NP inexorably allied black nationalistic movements with Communism, and used this equation to further the fear of the black majority in South Africa, and Southern

Africa on the whole. "The security of the white minority regime in South Africa was the predominant priority of Pretoria's foreign policy" (Guimarães 122).

America also conditioned soldiers and assured citizens that the United States was in Vietnam to stop the onslaught of Communists. "We weren't in My Lai to kill human beings. We were there to kill ideology carried by – I don't know. Pawns. Blobs. Pieces of flesh. I was there to destroy an intangible idea. To destroy communism" (qtd. in Bilton and Sim 372).³ This soldier, Lt. William Calley, who was put on trial and convicted for his involvement in the My Lai massacre, is proof of just how deeply engrained this anti-Communist rhetoric was in America and her military. The military, the individual soldiers, and initially, the American people felt strongly about protection from Communism during the Cold War era. This was the philosophy that the average grunt was taught: "And I thought if we were there then it must be right. We have to stop Communism before it gets to America. I was just like all the other dummies" (qtd. in Terry 63). Soldiers are not meant to question the ideology behind the war they are sent to wage: "I'm an American fighting man. I serve the forces which guard democracy, my country. Gung ho. All the way. Not from enthusiasm, but from training. This is my profession" (qtd. in Terry 175). Many soldiers and Americans alike were led to believe that " '... we're better off fighting the Communists here [in Vietnam] than fighting them back in San Diego' " (qtd. in Laurence 449). This ideology often fell apart in the midst of guerrilla warfare in the jungle, and many troops felt betrayed by an ideology and a country that they believed they were protecting: "Vietnam taught you to be a liar. To be a thief. To be dishonest. To go against everything you ever learned... You wasn't here for democracy. You wasn't protecting your homeland..." (qtd. in Terry 128).

A South African Defence Force (SADF) soldier encountered this special brand of South African ideology while on the border. He was asked, "Are you going to wait until you

³ This quote was taken originally from Body Count: Lieutenant Calley's Story by John Sacks (Hutchinson, 1971).

are standing with your back to South Beach before you realise that the communists plan to take over your country? This is the thin edge of the wedge, pally. If we lose the war up here, we'll be overrun. The blacks will take over... and that will be that" (qtd. in Andrew 73). One could argue that the fear of Communist takeover was used to strengthen the position of the white minority rule, as well as to curry favor with stronger Western allies, such as America, in their campaigns against Communism. One SADF soldier observed that:

Great pride was taken by our leaders who proclaimed we were defending Western values, that South Africa and its mandate South West Africa were one of the last bulwarks on the continent resisting the communist onslaught on democracy. Such claims contained a great deal of nonsense of course, for the reasoning that equated apartheid with long-cherished Western values such as democracy was manifestly false, but the military subscribed to it and most white South Africans mouthed such sentiments as gospel. (Feinstein 4)

Christianity

This protection of the homeland from Communism was further espoused by the Church and the Christian community and parents. In South Africa, the Bible was handed to the troops with a message from Mr. PW Botha, which read, " 'This Bible is the most important part of your military equipment' " (qtd. in TRC 4: 227). The SADF deliberately fused church and state in this overt demonstration of propaganda. Even once in the war itself, this deliberate union of anti-Communist sentiment with Christianity is evident. A Padre in the SADF upheld the conventional dogma regarding the apartheid governments' doctrine, conveying (according to the author's memory) that "the system had flaws, but that right now we were in SWA as agents of law and order – on God's side so to speak. We were the 'good' guys. The commies were the 'bad' guys. Clearly, he supported the status quo" (Andrew 65). The United States armed forces also Christianized their mission. Duty to country was part and parcel of "the gospel of America's duty to preserve global order" (Karnow 10). One Vietnam veteran tried to explain the convergence of church with duty to state within America: "Mom is not college educated, so all she knows is what the propaganda situation is. She programmed us to be devoted to duty, to God, state and country. She said, 'You got to do all these

good things – like military service - to be a citizen here in America’ ” (qtd. in Terry 118).

Anti-communism was automatically on the side of good, and as one South African conscript explained, “ ‘..the dominee told us that if we died fighting communists we were doing God’s work and he personally assured us passage into heaven’ ” (qtd. in Draper 180). Your country stands for everything good, its military pursuits are noble, and you are good in the eyes of God and country as a soldier. This notion of fighting on God’s side, or on the side of good, only furthered the propaganda against the Communist enemy in both wars. Another conscript corroborates this propaganda by the dominees: “Of course, we knew that the riots would be quickly put down because our dominee told us that God was on our side, and was looking after our officers, and He wouldn’t bother Himself with godless savages who just wanted to upset the Afrikaans speaking community” (MW). In addition, printed on the inside of a border exemption is this Bible verse: “*Here, U is my God, ek wil U prys en U Naam loof. U het wonders gedoen... U het die rumoer van die vyand laat ophou*” Jes. 25:1, the last line of which is poignant (WC). Loosely translated, this means, ‘You have stopped the uprising of the enemy’, which is another example of South African church, state and military jointly offering the same propaganda.

Besides the Church, chaplains and parents, the education system of South Africa also condoned and supported this marriage of church and the state military. “The national education system consistently presented military training as a given part of the rites of passage of white men and the moral duty of anyone concerned with defending order and morality (Christianity) against the forces of evil and chaos (Soviet-inspired Communism)...” (TRC 4: 224). Yet, in combat, soldiers began to have difficulty with such ingrained ideas about good and bad, and some questioned notions of religion and morality that may have misled them. One South African soldier confessed, “I just can’t carry two contradictory views in my head. Obedient gung-ho killer for a collective white paranoia...or a servant of Jesus Christ. In me they can’t be reconciled. They repel each

other like the poles of magnets” (qtd. in Andrew 100). Vietnam vets experienced similar difficulty in assimilating or reconciling fighting on God’s side with the reality of guerilla warfare. They witnessed fellow soldiers from religious backgrounds having “...trouble reconciling what they were doing... They were having a lot of trouble killing people, basically. I saw some fairly sensitive kids begin to know themselves because of this and begin to discover contradictions in their thinking” (qtd. in Santoli 71).

Exceptionalism

This notion of duty to God and country was the foundation of the exceptionalism of America, which can be defined as America’s self-perceived obligation “...to export their benefits to less privileged civilizations abroad” (Karnow 12). The Vietnam War was a prime example of this philosophy, which included “...fulfilling some sacred responsibility...” and being “...singled out by the divinity for the salvation of the planet” (13). This American brand of exceptionalism could be interpreted as pure arrogance. In the case of South Africa, exceptionalism was evident in the policies of a racist regime. This concept of protecting people from themselves is a product of a government believing that South Africa’s calling was to save Southern Africa from Communism and blacks alike. One South African commander bemoaned, “Maybe we are the abnormal ones who invariably strive to change situations and peoples to suit ourselves – not always for the better” (Breytenbach, *Buffalo* 57). American and South African policy makers both seemed to believe that the Vietnamese people and the Angolan/Namibian people and tribes could not rule or take care of themselves, which justifies their being “determined to save them from the unimaginable damnation of communism” (Feinstein 16).

At a young and impressionable age, both American draftees and South African conscripts were shocked to experience, firsthand, the reality of implementing their nation’s foreign policy. One is no longer John Wayne and all the bravery and good intentions are starkly contrasted with the reality of being a foot soldier, a messenger of certain policies. One Vietnam veteran recalls the impact of realizing that American democracy and foreign

policy are not necessarily right, just or wanted: “The Vietnamese did not like us and I remember I was shocked. I still naively thought of myself as a hero, as a liberator. And to see the Vietnamese look upon us with fear or hatred visible in their eyes was a shock...” (qtd. in Willenson 112). South African conscripts equally believed that their parents, church and state sanctioned their mission; many were just as dismayed to face the stark reality of apartheid as they delivered very clear messages to their neighbors. A South African soldier recalls an officer’s speech from up on the border:

First you need to understand that you are here as diplomats, as ambassadors of South Africa – of civilisation. This war is not a full-scale conventional engagement. It’s a war of terror and persuasion. Insurgency and counter-insurgency. It’s a war of psychology. You have to win the hearts and minds of the people. This war will not be won by military action on the ground, but through influencing people toward non-communist ideas and Christian values. (qtd. in Andrew 80)

To find out firsthand that devotion to country and God certainly does not explain the death of a fellow soldier, or justify the murder of innocent civilians – these are difficult epiphanies at age eighteen or nineteen. The idea of justice and Christian values did not seem to gel with the notion of ‘diplomats’ murdering a village that supposedly needs ‘saving’.

Exceptionalism goes hand in hand with the notion of saving a nation or a people from themselves. One soldier aptly summarized his frustration and disgust with seeing the effects of American exceptionalism, since Americans “...were in effect saying to Vietnam, ‘We’re going to make you free, to save you from Communism, if we have to kill everyone to do it’ ”(qtd. in Willenson 87). The soldier wants to be a hero and help save people or a nation, but ends up experiencing destruction. It is no wonder many soldiers struggle to reconcile the notion of good, Christian hero and liberator with the real experiences as a trained killer. The words ‘free’ or ‘democracy’ seem as empty, meaningless and futile as the physical and mental strategies implemented to supposedly achieve such freedom. In Vietnam, soldiers struggled to understand the audacity of the decisions made by government or military leaders: “ ‘ With an arrogance that has no

parallel, we have taken it upon ourselves to decide for a certain small Asian nation that its people are better dead than red...’ ” (qtd. in Laurence 425). The same concept applies to South Africa’s intervention in Namibia and Angola. “With an overbearing arrogance, South Africa had decided it knew what was best for the Owambo people and waged a war in order to protect a people from themselves”(Feinstein 35).

Arrogance has been used to explain both American and South African policies that exposed their belief that they were the exceptional nation destined to ‘save’ other, lesser nations. It seems as if destroying and saving are two separate concepts, but not so in the case of the Vietnam War or the Border War. “At one point in the war, after U.S. aircraft had reduced a South Vietnamese province capital to rubble, an American army officer was quoted as explaining that ‘we had to destroy the town in order to save it’ ” (qtd. in Karnow 438). American exceptionalism often extended to include “a brand of missionary zeal”; “[t]hey called it ‘nation-building,’ and they would have been arrogant had they not been utterly sincere in their naïve belief that they could really reconstruct Vietnamese society along Western lines” (255). Whether American or South African soldiers believed in the sanctity of their mission from the start, many of them certainly came face to face with exceptionalism in action. As one US Marine so aptly illustrates:

I guess we believed our own publicity – Asian guerillas did not stand a chance against U.S. Marines – as we believed in all the myths created by that most articulate and elegant mythmaker, John Kennedy. If he was the King of Camelot, then we were his knights and Vietnam our crusade. There was nothing we could not do because we were Americans, and for the same reasons, whatever we did was right. (Caputo 69-70)

Both wars had their myths and their mythmakers, and the soldiers and the victims alike experienced the impact of exceptionalism and foreign policy at work.

The aftermath of Colonialism and the advent of Nationalism

Besides Communism and exceptionalism, colonialism is also at the foundation of both Vietnam and the Border Wars. Vietnam was plagued by thousands of years of colonial

conquest at the hands of such nations as China and France, and bears the mark of many centuries of conquerors. Angola and Namibia also have a heritage of colonial takeover, as Portugal ruled Angola and South Africa 'protected' Namibia as well as their own interests. The history of colonization oftentimes creates as well as complicates civil wars. America and South Africa both intervened in civil wars, and the aftermath of colonialism was an integral factor in both the Vietnam War and the Border War. Intervention in civil wars has consequences for the different sides who want liberation as well as for the country who intervenes (or interferes – depending on one's perspective).

Colonialism created a zealous brand of nationalism in both Vietnam and Angola/Namibia. At times, this nationalism was overlooked due to the danger that the ideologies of Marxism or Communism represented to the West and South Africa, and America and South Africa both misinterpreted their opposition's nationalism. For instance, Ho Chi Minh changed ideologies according to practicalities more than aspirations of world domination. Ho Chi Minh simply wanted Vietnam to be free – free of colonizers (the Chinese or the French) or interveners such as Americans. "As Ho explained year afterwards, 'it was patriotism and not Communism that originally inspired me'" (qtd. in Karnow 122). The Soviets offered North Vietnam the most ideal backing – financial and technical – and Ho Chi Minh was looking for the most opportune and successful way toward a free Vietnam. His obsession with freeing his homeland was at the root of the Viet Cong resistance, and not his position as a puppet of his Soviet, communist masters: "...Ho was essentially a pragmatist, principally preoccupied with Vietnam's salvation. While never forgetting his ultimate goal, he constantly shifted tactics to suit changing circumstances" (135-36). Similarly, in both Angola and Namibia, black liberation movements such as the MPLA or SWAPO were just as preoccupied with their own brand of nationalism. Perhaps like America, South Africa also exaggerated the influence or purpose that Communism served the ANC, PAC, MPLA or SWAPO, and overlooked the vital role of nationalism within the context of a civil war with colonial roots.

It could be argued that in Angola, “[t]he civil war almost took on the dimensions of a mini-Vietnam, with the struggle by proxy of the superpowers only slightly veiled by the regional interests of the neighboring states” (Birmingham 6). At the most simple level of comparison, civil wars divide nations – and this division is often clearly demarcated by region. Vietnam was clearly divided into North and South, and the war in Angola was also divided according to region. The MPLA, the Luanda-based Mbundu movement, held sway in the northern city as the Viet Cong did in North Vietnam, and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) held their main positions in the South highlands with Ovimbundu speaking people (the largest ethno-linguistic group in Angola) just as the Army of South Vietnam (ARVN) and Diem’s government were in South Vietnam (Guimarães 32). Yet, the divisions were not as simple as North and South in Angola; the civil war was more like a three-front war, as the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) held sway over the Bakongo homeland north of Mbundu–Kikongo speaking people on the Angola/Congo border (48). Angola was divided regionally, according to tribal loyalty, which also included issues of race, class and citizenship. Although these tribal and ethnic affiliations were not due to Portuguese rule; the tension and divisions amongst these groups are a direct result of Portugal’s colonial society, which only allowed certain races and classes to have ‘citizenship’ in Angola.

Vietnam and the Border Wars were not ‘colonial’ wars in the sense that America and South Africa did not want to colonize and rule over the countries, but both civil wars certainly owed their struggle in part to colonialism and its breakdown. The Vietnam War sustained and “...ironically, prolonged the colonial tradition which for so long had burdened IndoChina” (Goff, Sanders and Smith xii). However, some Border War ‘historians’ would certainly not agree that this conflict could be likened to a colonial war: “It has been called a ‘colonial’ war, but in at least one important aspect it was not. Where it differed from most such wars was that none of the fighters were foreigners, in the sense of coming to the battle-zone from distant lands, like the Americans in Vietnam and the British in Malaya” (Venter 138). Yet there were foreign advisors and troops from Cuba,

Zaire, China and the many mercenaries hired from a range of nations. Al Venter however, does agree "...for the insurgents on the one hand and the Ovambu soldiers and policemen of 101 Battalion and the SWA police it was nothing more or less than a civil war" (138). He goes into great detail explaining why the Border War was not a race war or a colonial war, but in his book The Chopper Boys: Helicopter Warfare in Africa, he never explores precisely what, for him, the conflict involved beyond a civil war.

Apartheid

Angolans were fighting Angolans and Vietnamese were fighting Vietnamese, which is the most tragic part of the colonialism-induced civil wars in Vietnam and Angola/Namibia. However, the Border War also saw South Africans fighting other South Africans. Black South Africans were not technically citizens of South Africa according to the government apartheid law. Therefore, fighting their own civil war in South Africa, many black South Africans joined what were then deemed 'terrorist' groups who trained over the border. Members of the military wing of the ANC, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) and POQO⁴, the original armed wing of the PAC, joined forces with the MPLA and other movements to fight against South African white conscripts in the townships and sometimes across the border. Apartheid complicates discussion of the Border War, in that South Africa, a nation divided, intervened in two other nations experiencing the same internal turmoil. As far as ideology goes, apartheid played a key role in South Africa's intervention in Namibia and Angola. Some argue that the conflict in Namibia was "an unnecessary struggle whose roots lay in the evil of apartheid" (Feinstein 7). Others (although they claim to be very liberal on the issues of race now) still do not think that the Border War had anything to do with race. However, considering that the black South Africans who fought against the NP during the Struggle are now in power, it is not hard to believe why there is no published evidence of conscripts who supported or believed in apartheid.

⁴ POQO means pure or true, which has often been interpreted to mean 'Blacks Only'

Therefore, there are only certain point of views represented in oral or military histories about the Border War. Apartheid as a legalized ideology complicates this topic immensely, since the very nature of the aftermath of apartheid hinders the articulation or expression of various points of view. There is the point of view of the white, English speaking liberal who espouses very politically correct sentiments such as “ ‘I’ll only feel like I have a country to die for when there’s a fair and just kind of law in South Africa’ ” (qtd. in Andrew 168). There are the oral histories, short stories and fiction of the Afrikaans-speaking conscript that are also very liberal when it comes to apartheid policy. There are the military accounts of battles, and covert operations, which are very pro-SADF and offer a very one-sided account. Then, at the opposite end of the spectrum there is the TRC, which it can be argued, is also very one-sided in another sense, except this time pro-ANC. I am interested in the middle ground, which I believe encompasses many South African conscripts either at the time of the Border War or now. This interstitial space can be likened to silence:

In the case of the Vietnam War the silence was very short, but as far as the Border Wars are concerned the silence is still continuing, notwithstanding the publication of a number of novels, most of them in Afrikaans. It would almost suggest that in the case of that last war the process of coming to terms with it still has to begin. I wonder whether the reticence surrounding it may be, at least partially, explained by the fact that the fighting in Angola and Mozambique somehow had become part of the anti-Apartheid struggle. That was certainly true for the National Party government... It goes a long way to explain the unwillingness to confront the Border wars in present-day South Africa, where nobody wants to be heard to say anything which might be explained as sympathetic to the Apartheid government. To find someone who actually fought in support of it is almost impossible. (Wolfswinkel, 173).

Chapter Two

Overarching Comparisons and Direct Links

Many people look at me incredulously when I mention that I am comparing the Vietnam War to the Border War in Namibia and Angola. At first mention, there seems to be insurmountable differences between wars fought in different times and on different continents. The notion of proximity is problematic for some, since Angola and Namibia are neighbors to South Africa, whereas Vietnam was thousands of miles from American soil. Then there is the notion of terrain: how can one compare a war fought in the swampy jungles of Vietnam to a war fought in the African bush? The sheer numbers that died in each conflict are quite disparate, which is a result of the high versus low intensity of both wars. One of the main differences is the percentage of Vietnam infantry soldiers who experienced prolonged and heavy combat situations compared to the very small percentage of white South African conscripts who experienced high intensity or prolonged combat exposure. In fact, much of the fighting done over the border was done by black Angolans, Bushmen and Namibian Ovambos led by white South African officers. Some white conscripts did indeed experience prolonged combat situations just like the soldiers in Vietnam, but this group was quite small in comparison. However, these two wars of intervention share numerous similarities mainly due to the nature of ideology as discussed, as well as the conditions endemic to guerilla war. Probably the most startling commonality lies in the fact that the soldiers returning home from lost wars met a legacy of shame and silence. The overall points of comparison between the two wars are: a two-front war, the draft versus conscription, draft dodging and the End Conscription Campaign (ECC), soldiers' obsession with time, and the media coverage of the wars. Lastly, it is necessary to determine what the direct links between Vietnam and the Border War show by analyzing whether South Africa took any lessons from Vietnam as well as America's own direct involvement in Angola.

During as well as after the era in which both wars were fought, America and South Africa were nations divided. The polarization of both countries is similar in that this climate at

home created a two-front war. One could equate South Africa's civil war – the war waged between the oppressed blacks in the townships – with the civil rights demonstrations and assassinations in America. This turmoil affected the troops fighting the war, and certainly dictated the environment to which some returned. One South African soldier explained that "... [f]or the first time in his life he felt the kind of pain that would increase as the struggle in South Africa moved on into a headlong impetus of violence, polarisation and confusion" (Andrew 86). The violence in the inner cities of America as well as the polarization of those that agreed with the war or were against it created chaos that greeted returning vets. Racial strife and civil unrest characterized both America and South Africa during the decades of their respective wars. The Vietnam War and the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement were happening simultaneously. Similarly, South Africans began to recognize that the Border War was an exercise in "...still trying to show the black man who was *baas*, but the struggle had moved uncomfortably closer to home" (Feinstein 151). The township violence and student demonstrations in South Africa could be likened to riots in inner cities in America as well as the student demonstrations that often ended in violence.

The soldiers themselves are best qualified to elucidate this environment of a two-front war. One South African involved in the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) stated, "*We live in an unjust society where basic human rights are denied to the majority of the people. We live in an unequal society where the land and the wealth are owned by the minority. We live in a society in a state of civil war, where brother is called on to fight brother*" (TRC 4: 228). With this civil war raging, South Africa intervened in Angola and Namibia, which can be seen as an extension or another front of the same war between minority rule and the remaining majority of the population. The strife that occurred in America due to power struggles involving race, gender, class, and anti-war sentiment was also seen as "...the other extreme of the same theater" of the Vietnam conflict (Herr 6).

This two-front war actualized brother fighting against brother across the borders, as well

as brothers within families disagreeing on the situation. The polarization and strife at home in turn informed the climate of the troops in the field and vice versa. The war conditions eventually infiltrated the climate back home, in Vietnam with the media exposure and in South Africa with news the soldiers brought back. One South African conscript received a letter from his *boet*, or brother stating, “ ‘*It’s a screwed up society, Neil... There’s kak in this land and soon we’re all going to have to wake up and choose sides. Being in the SADF is the wrong side as far as I’m concerned*’ ” (qtd. in Andrew 85). The soldiers in the field felt the war being fought without as well as the civil strife within America and South Africa. For instance, “[t]he death of Martin Luther King intruded on the war in a way that no other outside event had ever done” (Herr 158), just as the racial struggle in South Africa affected the white and non-white soldiers alike on both sides of the conflict. One conscientious objector stated that “... the guerrillas of the ANC and SWAPO were young men like myself who wanted justice and an end to apartheid; thus the SADF was not fighting a foreign aggressor but was engaged in a civil war. The message struck home. I decided that it was no longer possible for me to go to military camps” (qtd. in TRC 4: 230). South African and American soldiers alike were susceptible to being put on township duty or riot duty in the inner cities. One Vietnam veteran explained:

Coming back, my biggest fear was going to Fort Dix, because even though I wanted to be close to home, I didn’t want to be stuck on riot duty. I said, ‘ I’ll be damned if I come all the way back here from Vietnam to go on riot duty and have someone throw a bottle or a brick and split my head open’ What’s your reaction going to be? Pull that trigger? Shoot my own countrymen?” (qtd. in Santoli 115)

While some soldiers found riot or township duty more ominous and threatening than the war abroad, others explained that the transition from violence back into violence ironically was not challenging. It is almost as if the situation did not change – just their surroundings. For the Vietnam veteran, “[c]oming from Vietnam to the violence of American inner cities was not... a difficult transition” (Laurence 426). Likewise, for another veteran, “... the thought of being killed in the Black Panther Party by the police and the thought of being killed by Vietnamese was just a qualitative difference. I had left one war and came back and got into another one” (qtd. in Terry 11-12). In South Africa,

“[a]s the civil war intensified and the troops moved into the townships, questions were raised about the very location of the border. Resistance to conscription and the war increasingly focused on the inward journey of the border, particularly from Angola to the townships” (Drewett 129). For soldiers returning from the war on the border or in Vietnam, the civil unrest at home was just an extension of the violence they experienced at war.

There are both similarities and differences within my second point of comparison: that is, the actual induction into military service for American and South African soldiers. The draft and conscription are similar in that many young men had very little choice. For white South African boys, “[a] final border of sorts was that between conformity and resistance. Between South Africa and exile. Between going to the army and going to prison as a conscientious or political objector. The choice was stark” (Drewett 132). Many draftees and conscripts simply acquiesced, since there was no appealing alternative to national service. Whether they were stoical to this infringement on their life, or motivated by their military duty, many South Africans and Americans merely accepted and endured their mandatory service. As one Vietnam soldier put it, “[w]e don’t like being here. But we know we have to serve our time in the service. So, you can’t beat it. You have to go along with it the best you can. You’re going to have your ups and downs’ ” (qtd. in Lawrence 593). South African conscripts repeated this resignation shared by both Vietnam and Border War draftees: “It’s a bitch. So, that’s the way it panned out. You know, so you did your duty. All your mates were doing it. Everybody, you know, the whole country was sort of geared towards it. Nobody really knew much about what was going on” (PB).

The young age at which the draft and conscription called upon the boys also played a prominent role in the route they chose. For some, it made it easier to just go ahead and do it if everyone else was doing the same at that young age. One South African soldier explained the experience of processing in terms of his age: “you’re all aching as well -

you've just been ripped away from mummy's aprons and you don't know what the hell is going on" (PB). Similarly, in America, "*[i]n the 1960s, the long fall from the nest was provided primarily by the Draft. Boys were scooped up by the Selective Service System or enlisted in its shadow... None of them really knew where they were going. They knew little about where they had come from*" (Baker 5). Many young men decided to flee and live in exile, which also has its own brand of consequences and repercussions:

Some were socially conditioned to accept conscription as a national duty. Some saw no other option. Some saw options but were afraid of the consequences of refusing. Some were shocked and traumatised by what they experienced and began to question the world view they had always accepted. A few believed that, for a variety of very different reasons, it was their moral responsibility to refuse to serve in the military. (TRC 4: 244)

Every young man reacted differently to mandatory service, and even though the choice was extremely limited, some South Africans and Americans alike chose the alienation that goes with self-imposed exile while others opted for military service.

The reluctance or resignation of conscripts or draftees to their required duty to country is common to both wars, especially for those who were inducted later in both wars. The difference between the draft and conscription lies in the technical requirements or terms of each duty. Vietnam veterans were required to do an exact 365-day tour, whereas South Africans had a longer required time period of commitment. During the 1970s, "...all white males in South Africa were compelled by law to undergo military training. The duration of this training had steadily lengthened, and by 1978 it was a full two years. After training, soldiers still had to complete a number of camps of various durations..." (Andrew 7). South Africans were far from having done their duty after they did their first two required years. There is a large discrepancy between the amount of time that South Africans or Americans served:

After this [two year training] they are placed in the part-time civilian force for twelve years, during which time they must serve up to 720 days in annual thirty-, sixty-, or ninety-day 'camps'. Then they are placed in the active citizen force reserve for five years and may be required to serve twelve days a year in a local commando until the age of fifty-five. Finally, they are placed on the national reserve until they are sixty-five. (TRC 4: 223)

This is certainly not to say the requirements for South African soldiers were somehow more stringent or harsh, since the definition of 'camps' in South Africa was in some cases different from the experience of the foot soldier during his 365 day Vietnam tour. South African soldiers did many more 'returns' home (and this could complicate the return home considerably) and did more 'time' in the SADF.

Another difference resulting from conditions for the SADF or the American military requirements was that in South Africa there were completely different generations serving side by side in camps. This does not apply to basic training, but the subsequent camps, "...because you had guys that were straight out of the army, straight out of basic training, or guys that had been out of training for five to ten years, whatever the case may be – you had these different age groups. So you'd be doing duty with, you know as a twenty-year-old for example, with someone who did his national service in the sixties" (PB). In Vietnam, most of the guys serving together would be relatively the same age; a twenty-four year old would be considered old in a typical platoon or unit. Thus, in addition to the disparate terms of service, American draftees usually fought with men of the same generation operating as a platoon, whereas South African conscripts may or may not have served with various generations in camp together.

Not everyone chose to serve their required time in the military. Soldiers and citizens alike disagreed with their respective wars. An interesting parallel drawn between draft and conscription is the number of soldiers who protested the required service; some chose exile, prison or desertion instead. One American soldier was asked why he put on a uniform and he replied, " 'Well, I had a nice choice: six years in prison or Canada or here. I might as well be here, you know?' " (qtd. in Laurence 683). As both wars dragged on, the public and young men subject to drafts became more enlightened about the reality of serving in either conflict. This awareness was due in part to certain anti-war organizations and their endeavor to educate and lobby for the rights of soldiers and

citizens that opposed the wars. South Africa's ECC and the anti-war movement in America (which encompasses a vast array of organizations) professed to serve prospective soldiers, soldiers who returned from their tour, as well as the public who opposed the war. In the forefront of South Africa's protest movements, the ECC, "formed as a coalition of human rights, religious, women's and student groups", provided support for conscientious objectors and those in exile or prison (Nathan 311). In America, returned veterans founded The Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) in 1967 to help support soldiers who turned against the war in which they fought. "For them, struggling to end the war was the only way to make sense of the 365 days they had spent fighting it" (Young 255). The ECC attracted disillusioned soldiers coming back from the Border War as well:

I'd never even thought about how justified the SADF was in being in the townships until one night on patrol, I suddenly looked around from the back of a Buffel [military vehicle] in Tembisa [township] and thought, 'What the hell am I doing here?' I just freaked out after that, because from my point of view we were maybe doing more harm than good. (qtd. in Nathan 313)

The anti-war movements in America and South Africa were similar, in that they both gained popularity and momentum as both conflicts significantly escalated. The meaning of escalation in both wars differed; for South Africa, escalation meant sending troops into the South African black townships, and in Vietnam, escalation meant sending more US combat troops overseas. In South Africa, "[a]fter the widespread deployment of troops in black townships in 1985, it [ECC] experienced a tremendous groundswell of support; the war resistance movement rapidly expanded rapidly beyond its traditional constituencies, and an anti-war culture emerged" (Nathan 308-09). The anti-war movements not only opposed mandatory draft or conscription, but also the foreign policies of their respective governments. In America, "[b]y 1967, a complex national anti-war movement to resist the war had developed. The movement was never uniform in its ideology, its composition, or its tactics. But at its lowest common denominator – the demand to bring the troops home now – it sounded like the voice of the people" (Young 197). Not all young men willingly accepted conscription or the draft, and some endured harsh prison

sentences and alienation in exile due to their beliefs. Additionally, as the wars dragged on, many soldiers refused induction or even deserted during their duty. During Vietnam, “[i]n mid-1965, there were already 380 prosecutions for induction refusal; three years later, the number was 3,305” (Young 197). South African young men evading conscription also increased dramatically: “In 1985, some 7 589 conscripts failed to report for the first major call-up after the deployment of troops in the townships” (qtd. in Nathan 313). Thus, the opposition to the draft and conscription in the form of anti-war movements were similar in South Africa and America, in that citizens and soldiers alike came together to try to effect change in governmental policies.

Only a minority of young men managed to dictate their immediate fate by evading the draft, choosing prison or escaping in exile. By its very nature, the fate of a soldier was not in his hands. A Vietnam soldier could get sent into a very ‘hot’ area with lots of enemy and into firefights or ambushes, but he might just as easily be assigned to a cushy supply job in the rear. By the same token, South Africans who were called away to camps might have a stint on the border and see contact, or else they might wind up with their mates in a camp in Durban, spending plenty of time surfing. More often than not, South African conscripts went to the border and did not always face extended combat or action. Regardless, soldiers in both wars were aware of the lack of control they had over their own fate, and consequently, seemed to have an exaggerated obsession with time. The soldiers’ days were numbered, literally and sometimes figuratively. Thus, you had the cherries, or FNGs and you had short-timers and lifers. ‘Short-timers’ designated Vietnam soldiers who had a month or less to go in their year tour of duty, whereas ‘lifers’ would be the career soldiers or the men who kept volunteering for more tours. All these designations revolved around how much time you had left in your tour, camp or border duty. As in Vietnam, South African troops had similar notions of a short-timer:

The countdown of the remaining days of national service or a border camp was as commonplace as during the tour of duty in Vietnam. In the case of South African troops, those with few days (‘min dae’) were known as ‘ou manne’ (old timers). This fixation with survival meant that the ‘ou manne’ were treated with respect over and above their rank (or lack thereof). Short-timer’s syndrome is illustrated

in Vietnam narratives where survival and avoiding danger became the main preoccupation. (Baines 167)

Just as Vietnam soldiers "...counted each day until they could go home" (Laurence 371), South African soldiers would mark their time, such as "[w]hen you started you were out there but it got closer and closer and eventually there was a spark and you were home" (PB).

Besides the perspective of soldiers rotated back home, the media also played a role in how both wars were viewed. There definitely is a disparity in the impact the media had in both wars. With Vietnam, the press played a central role in how the public viewed the war. Some argue that the media was personally responsible for swaying public opinion against both the war and the soldiers who fought the 'immoral' war. However, in South Africa, there was an immense censorship of the press. John Laurence points out that, "Vietnam is often referred to as 'television's war,' in the sense that this is the first war that has been brought to the people preponderantly by television" (qtd. in Lawrence 434). The South African media coverage of the Border War had a very different impact from the American media, since South Africa's experience of news from the border did not depend on seeing boys being blown away on the nightly news. "Every now and again news filtered down that more South African soldiers had been killed in the operational area. The operational area. Was that Angola or the border? No one really knew. The press was restricted so no one could tell us" (Andrew 6). However, some reporters in Vietnam argued that although there was no overt censorship as in South Africa, the military still altered the truth to suit its agenda:

Public information officers, the army's career public relations staff, shaped reality to fit their version of events. An enemy ambush became 'a meeting engagement.' A rifle company that had been outmaneuvered and overrun 'fought a running battle in hand-to-hand combat.' When the enemy finished fighting and withdrew with its dead and wounded, it was said to have 'fled the battlefield.' These military versions of events were reported by the press without judgment. Truth and falsehood got equal weight. (Laurence 404-05)

The contradiction still remains that South Africa censored the press, and the Border War was formally covered to a considerably smaller degree than Vietnam was covered in the American press. The discrepancy between the media coverage of the Vietnam War versus the Border War created different climates for the return of the soldiers. When Border War soldiers returned home from the first two years or from shorter camps, they usually tried to blend in. Since all white men were required to serve, many soldiers did not bother to talk in great detail about a common experience held by all. However, the media coverage that brought the Vietnam War into each American home with nightly broadcasts created a social climate to which Vietnam vets could not return inconspicuously. "The war corrupted everything it touched. Television images of the slaughter touched the eyes of millions of viewers, bringing the horror home. The effect of that transference, night after night for over ten years, was more apocalyptic than anyone knew" (Laurence 395-96). Especially toward the end of the war, as America saw their boys being blown up on national television, the returning veteran was forced to confront or somehow justify his role in the war, whether he was ready or not at that exact time to face it. Veterans received attention when arriving home, but protests were a far cry from parades.

On the other hand, South Africa did not have the Border War splashed all over the radio, newspapers and televisions. There was no such thing as South African war correspondents following soldiers into Angola and bringing the war home via television. Gary Baines argues that "...unlike the Americans in the case of Vietnam, they [South Africans] could hardly blame the media for the defeat because there was an almost total news 'black out' pertaining to the war: neither the newly-established SABC television channel nor the print media carried much coverage of the Border War" (Baines 168). However, the return for the South African soldier was complicated for different reasons, due to the political climate after apartheid fell, which reinforced silence, not open protest. Even during apartheid, the protest of the ECC was subject to "extensive and sophisticated smear campaign[s]" from government, military and fellow citizens alike (Nathan 317). Eventually, because its success posed such a threat to the NP, the ECC was officially

banned in 1988 (Nathan 320). This complication was not due, however, to traditional media coverage. A South African commander explained that he never saw South African press over the border:

It was certainly not the fault of the press, for they – unlike the overseas press which was having a heyday with stories about South Africa’s intervention – were only allowed to print what they were told.

Not a single South African reporter was seen by me during our advance north. I saw an overseas TV cameraman shooting without hindrance seemingly unlimited film of us entering Lobito. This was when the South African media were being briefed that our forces were engaged in only ‘hot pursuit operations’ slightly north of the South West African border. (Breytenbach, *Buffalo* 128)

Although the press coverage was controlled, many sectors of the South African public still managed to eventually see the war as a lost, immoral endeavor. This highlights how public opinion and political climate affect soldiers during and after their service and vice versa. The ECC managed to attract a large sector of the English-speaking white community through less traditional forms of media: “The ECC presented their work through rock concerts, film festivals, art exhibitions and multi-cultural events. These reached new audiences who were not attracted to formal political activities” (Nathan 316). South African society was not saturated with television, radio and newspaper reports of the Border War, but “the dramatic growth of support for the ECC” is evidence that awareness was accessible (Nathan 314).

Direct Links

How is it that a soldier walking point in the jungles of Vietnam and a soldier on patrol in the African bush had such similar experiences? Not only were both groups of soldiers indoctrinated to hate Communism and regard their enemy as sub-human, but also the conditions of guerrilla warfare were parallel. Moreover, there are direct links between the Vietnam War and the Border War in terms of lessons learned by South Africa and the direct, but supposedly ‘covert’ American involvement in Angola. South Africa learned from America’s tactical failures, and tried to capitalize on this knowledge. For example, when South Africa was just outside Luanda, those in charge of military strategy paused to reflect on the effect of such a move. Those in charge predicted high casualties:

“Supposing they went ahead and captured Luanda, who would they hand it over to? Neither UNITA nor FNLA had the capability to hold it on its own. So Luanda would become South Africa’s Saigon, with the Angolan hinterland her Vietnam. The real war would only then begin” (Stiff 119). South Africa had the luxury of hindsight, which was helpful for specific military tactics as well as the overall effect of a war of insurgency on a country. They observed the effect that high casualty rates had on government, elections, and public opinion and support of the war effort in America. They also were cautious about making the same mistake in Luanda that Americans made with Saigon. South Africa gauged the escalation of troop involvement, decided on strategic battle tactics, as well as avoided certain general risks, with Vietnam as the model. Vietnam provided South Africa with the do’s and don’ts of a sort of guerrilla warfare manual.

The SADF was not the only party to take lessons from Vietnam. South Africa’s ‘enemies’ – more specifically the MPLA as well as the ANC – also drew upon the strategies of America’s enemy in Vietnam, the North Vietnamese. The foe in Angola for both the US and South Africa was the MPLA, which also took notes from America’s failures in Vietnam. Nito Alves, an important leader of the MPLA stated, “We are one hundred percent enemies and can never come to any agreement. Our fight must go on until [the] FNLA is defeated as the American imperialists were in Vietnam” (Guimarães 105). The nationalistic liberation movements in Angola were inspired by the North Vietnamese defeat of the American superpower, and this also gave them a model to study. Similarly, the ANC undertook a very detailed study into the successful strategies implemented by Ho Chi Minh and the North Vietnamese. “The ‘lessons from Vietnam’ were contained in a report which became known as *The Green Book*, finalised in March 1979. It envisaged a strategy involving the escalation of armed attacks combined with the building of mass organisations” (TRC 2: 27-28).

America of course, also had direct involvement in South Africa’s Border War. Despite the loss of Vietnam and determined to win against Communism, the US gave covert aid

to two nationalist movements in Angola, but more specifically, UNITA, South Africa's ally. South Africa and America were allies at one stage in the war against Communism being waged in Angola. In fact, there is specific evidence to the effect that the US considered giving its allies, UNITA and South Africa, weapons of mass destruction used in Vietnam. Americans toyed with the idea of shipping over 'Puff the Magic Dragon', a very heavily armed piece of machinery that inflicted damage in Vietnam, to aid in Angola (Stiff 106-07). The idea was abandoned, but the CIA presence, funding and backing in Angola was clear; the intelligence agency supposedly worked closely with the intelligence branch of the SADF. The CIA supposedly cooperated with the South African security forces in creating the Bureau for State Security (BOSS), their own intelligence branch (TRC 2: 16).

There is much controversy over the American and South African alliance; many of South Africa's soldiers squabble over whether the withdrawal of the Americans was the main reason they lost in Angola, or if the direct strategy of the SADF failed them. Regardless, by the time the South Africans pulled out of Angola, world opinion was not prepared to see America and South Africa side by side in the struggle against Communism. It is amazing that America even attempted to intervene again in another civil war and pit itself against its Communist counterparts in yet another lost war without having learned important lessons from Vietnam. This time they did attempt to keep it from the American public, and when their alliance with South Africa leaked to the world, they pulled out.

Chapter Three

GUERRILLA WARFARE: Physical and Psychological Tactics and Conditions

The Vietnam War and the Border War were both wars of insurgency in which guerrilla war tactics reigned; physical and psychological conditions of guerrilla warfare are evident in the jungles of Vietnam as well as the African bush in Angola and Namibia.

Dr. Gary Koen, a psychologist who testified before the TRC explained:

Guerrilla warfare, the type of war fought on the South African borders for the past twenty years, contains many unique features not seen in conventional warfare. These include hit and run tactics, surprise ambushes, extensive use of landmines and booby traps, as well as the stress experienced by people who are primarily town dwellers fighting a bush war. Unpredictability characterises this type of environment and the uncertainty of either attack or safety leads to a higher level of anxiety and hyper-arousal in anticipation of the next attack. (4: 237)

The element of unpredictability is a constant in both the physical terrain and mental environment of a jungle or bush war of insurgency. There are physical and psychological aspects of guerrilla warfare, and it is difficult to discern which is the more formidable threat. "On a far smaller scale, guerilla warfare is a different expression of the indirect approach. It is an offensive designed to get the enemy, especially its command structures, off balance physically as well as psychologically" (Breytenbach, *Buffalo* 178). Some aspects of a war of insurgency are difficult to classify as simply physical or psychological, since many of the demands on the body also greatly affected the mind. One South African commander highlighted the mutual exclusivity of the mental and physical conditions of guerilla warfare: "We had to out-guerilla the SWAPO guerillas. We had to get them off balance and keep them on the wrong foot until they began to collapse psychologically and subsequently also militarily" (*Buffalo* 178). Michael Herr described the split between mental and physical conditions by referring to one as the wait and the other as the delivery: "Fear and motion, fear and standstill, no preferred cut there, no way even to be clear about which was really worse, the wait or the delivery. Combat spared far more men than it wasted, but everyone suffered the time between contact, especially when they were going out every day looking for it..." (15).

Engaging in a detailed comparison of conditions of both guerilla wars is necessary, since in such wars of insurgency there is no organized attack, no major battle tactic to highlight, or ground to capture indefinitely. Vietnam and the Border Wars were comprised of many undecided 'search and destroy' missions and often the same town, kraal or piece of land was taken and retaken continuously. These two wars were unique in how they were fought and the effect that these conditions of uncertainty and unpredictability had on the soldiers as well as on the outcome of the war. There are five main points of comparison of physical conditions: terrain as third aggressor; the body count in relation to a war of attrition; use of trackers; effectiveness of allies, and destruction of the natural resources and land. These conditions took a mental toll on soldiers and dictated the physical tactics and conditions soldiers fought in.

The psychological tactics revolved largely around the use of persuasion and propaganda, which often wore down soldiers more than any grueling physical demands of warfare. The first psychological aspect of guerilla warfare that warrants comparison is the use of propaganda to dehumanize the enemy, as well as the propaganda used by the enemy. The second comparison involves the inability to distinguish enemy from ally; this creates two other related conditions of guerilla warfare – there were no 'safe' areas and there were civilian massacres as a result, such as in the case of My Lai and Kassinga.⁵ Overall, whether one fears 'the delivery' or dreads 'the wait,' both the physical and psychological conditions of Vietnam and the Border Wars contributed to the difficult assimilation of returning soldiers.

Physical Aspects of Guerilla Warfare

The first physical aspect of the Vietnam War and the Border War was the terrain that became an added aggressor. The jungle and the bush posed a hostile threat; the jungle in Vietnam and the African bush were another enemy to battle. South African troops that operated on the border in Angola/Namibia certainly fought the terrain: "They learned to

⁵ There are two acceptable spellings of this Angolan settlement – either Kassinga or Cassinga.

cope with severe extremes of temperature – soul-scorching heat by day and bitter cold at night – thick bush, mopane flies, lack of water, and poor food with little of it for sometimes three months at a time” (Breytenbach, *Buffalo* 188). Similarly, Vietnam troops battled the elements, mainly the heat, the insects, malaria, poisonous plants or snakes and jungle rot. “Flying over the jungle was almost pure pleasure, doing it on foot was nearly all pain. I never belonged in there. Maybe it really was what its people had always called it, Beyond; at the very least it was serious, I gave up things to it I probably never got back” (Herr 10). This very physical component of war also translated into mental strain, as the jungle or the bush became hauntingly animated to some soldiers. The physical conditions in the jungle or bush also affected the foot soldiers in very real, psychological ways.

Slugging aimlessly through the jungle or trekking miles into endless bush, soldiers of Vietnam and the Border Wars dealt with their difficult environments as well as how success was measured for them. In both wars, success was not in relation to enemy territory captured or how many miles or kilometers were covered, which made this daily fight against terrain seem even more pointless. The body count of the enemy was what determined victory according to the SADF and the American military. “That was how success was measured in the Namibian war. By the SWAPO body count” (Feinstein 55). In a congruous fashion, in Vietnam, “[b]ody counts were the chief measure of success. Capturing territory meant nothing, killing Vietnamese everything. The land of Vietnam became a vast blood-covered killing ground” (Laurence 371). Progress was a very murky hinterland, when slain, ‘supposed’ SWAPO, MPLA, or North Vietnamese bodies piled up. Caputo makes the point: “And the measures of a unit’s performance in Vietnam were not the distances it had advanced or the number of victories it had won, but the number of enemy soldiers it had killed (body count) and the proportion between that number and the number of its own dead (the kill ratio)” (168). Thus, these wars were about who killed whom first and in what quantity. In fact, the enemy also calculated success according to these standards; Vietnamese determined victory by “ ‘the traffic in homebound American coffins’ ” (qtd. in Karnow 18). This set the stage for wholesale slaughter on all sides, and

since terrorists and communists all seem to look alike, many innocent civilian deaths also got calculated into this giant military numbers game. For instance, in Vietnam, “[s]ome line companies did not even bother taking prisoners; they simply killed every VC they saw, and a number of Vietnamese who were only suspects. The latter were usually counted as enemy dead, under the unwritten rule ‘If he’s dead and he’s Vietnamese, he’s VC’ ” (Caputo 229).

Body counts were essential to wars of attrition, which characterizes both military strategies of America and South Africa. The Border War was seen as “a bushwar of attrition” (Birmingham 39), and the American military promoted a similar policy “that rode us [soldiers] into attrition traps on the back of fictional kill ratios” (Herr 214). However, attrition is not a one-sided strategy:

And so the military policy called ‘attrition’ was invoked. The long-term destruction of North Vietnam’s human and material resources was codified, justified, rationalized, and reinforced as an attainable goal of U.S. military strategy. With ten enemy dead for every one of ours, it was thought, American power would grind the North Vietnamese into weakness, submission, and eventual defeat. The flaw in the logic, the weak link in the American analysis, was the failure to recognize that attrition works both ways. (Laurence 291)

Attrition worked both ways in the case of Vietnam and the Border Wars, and it also had a detrimental effect on public opinion at home. “Westmoreland’s war of attrition, calculated to grind down the North Vietnamese and Vietcong, instead wore out his own forces – and, in the process, gradually exhausted the patience of the American public” (Karnow 464). South Africa seemed to have learned their lesson from Vietnam, in that the military knew that there was a strict limit as to what the South African white minority would accept in the way of casualties. Instead of sacrificing white conscripts, South Africa trained foreign black troops from Angola and Namibia to fight under white South African leadership. Attrition evokes a test of endurance, and whoever can absorb the most dead wins. America and South Africa were not willing to pay the price in body bags that their opposition was more than willing to sacrifice.

Another similarity between walking point in the jungle or doing patrols in the bush is that many times trackers would accompany the soldiers. The use of trackers, whether they volunteered or were forced, is common to both Vietnam and the Border Wars. One South African soldier noted, “A tracker-cum-interpreter is on board with us. He too is dressed in a military uniform, a khaki sun hat and shorts. Apparently his family had been wiped out by SWAPO so he has reasons for hunting his own kind” (qtd. in Andrew 47).

American troops nicknamed their trackers ‘Kit Carsons’:

We had what they called a Kit Carson in our unit. Kit Carson was a guy from the Vietnamese Army who was assigned to American units. When we went out to search and destroy a village, he would come in and talk to the Vietnamese, find out if they seen [sic] any VC in the area. Then he comes back and translates it to us...

I could never understand how these guys survived, the Kit Carsons. To me they’re like traitors. (qtd. in Baker 185-86)

Trackers were a distinct advantage in both wars, since they knew the lay of the land, the language and were often invaluable at picking up spoors in the bush or detecting booby traps in the jungle. There are many reasons to fight against one’s own people; these trackers each had their own motivation, which involved either a personal vendetta, or money and often the ability to squat on land next to military bases (SD).

Trackers were not the only individuals who knew the land and language better than the South Africans or Americans. Both sides had allies in their fight: UNITA and the ARVN. Most of the time, it seemed as if their ally complicated rather than aided in the fight against their own countrymen. The enemy in both the Vietnam War and the Border War were feared and respected far more than the allies, mainly UNITA and ARVN. The cowardice of one’s allies certainly complicated physical conditions of battle, in that they often hindered the fight more than they assisted. In Vietnam, “[t]here were a couple of units, the South Vietnamese marines, the rangers and the paratroopers, who would stand and fight for the most part, but working with regular ARVNs or the Popular Forces or police – that was a liability” (Santoli 117). Similarly, the South Africans fighting with or alongside UNITA troops claim that they, like the ARVN, were ineffective soldiers. One

South African commander explains that “UNITA soldiers were abandoning their positions to the right of my own combat line and streaming past us, heading for the rear in a mad panic. They had a habit of withdrawing the moment the enemy artillery opened up and returning later...” (Breytenbach, *Buffalo* 114). It made the physical and tactical preparations complicated, since there was no way to be sure the exact number of ready and willing allied troops who would actually fight. Allied flight could be put down to cowardice or even inexperience or lack of training or motivation, which affected morale: soldiers were fighting to help protect and serve allies who had little interest in waging the battle themselves. One Vietnam soldier cynically told a war correspondent in the midst of allies retreating, “ ‘So this is supposed to be *their* war’ ” (qtd. in Laurence 281). American and South African soldiers wondered why they were there fighting in the first place with indifferent allies.

Finally, the last point of comparison between the physical conditions in both wars is the environment itself. Lives, innocence, truth, morality were all lost in war, but the damage and destruction done to the environment were just as irreparable. In Vietnam, landmines, napalm and chemicals such as Agent Orange all left the countryside demolished and devastated. In Angola, especially during the Border War, the railway, the bridges, and the transportation system were severely decimated. The majority of the population of Vietnam, Angola and Namibia are economically tied to the natural resources – farming rice in the case of Vietnam and oil, mining, and farming in the case of Angola and Namibia. The animal life along the Caprivi strip was poached and destroyed. This destruction of the environment continues to take lives, such as the landmines that injure civilians to this day; this devastation renders the post-war economy and infrastructure useless. Not only was the killing of civilians rationalized in the context of the guerilla war, but also the destruction of the environment. Some soldiers realized that “ ‘... we’re destroying the countryside, making peasant farmers into refugees, hundreds of thousands of people with nowhere to live. A lot of them are sick, and hungry. We’re driving them off the land into camps. It’s cruel because the Vietnamese are wedded to their land. It’s

in their souls' ” (qtd. in Laurence 424). The effects of the Border War were just as severe:

The environmental effects of the war on the south (and in the Caprivi) were devastating. Both forest lands and wildlife were destroyed. This rape of the environment was sanctioned by the SADF. In the early 1980s, covert front companies were established to facilitate trading in rare woods like teak and kiaat, and in ivory, skins and diamonds. A safari company was also set up through which the hunting of big game was regulated. Ostensibly, these activities were undertaken to raise secret funds for UNITA, but they led quickly to widespread and high-level corruption. (TRC 2: 60)

Psychological Aspects of Guerilla Warfare

Many soldiers used the words 'tension', 'detachment' and 'unpredictability' to describe what fighting a guerilla war did to the mind. For some it was the agony of the anticipation of what was to come. The waiting became torturous, waiting for the battle where one's manhood and bravery were put to the test – waiting to see if they behaved with grace under fire. One soldier observed “the detachment of men who find themselves living in the presence of death. They had lost their first man in battle, and, with him, the youthful confidence in their own immortality” (Caputo 162). Death seemed like a presence even more encompassing than the enemy hiding in the jungle or the bush did. At times, the anticipation or expectation of death or injury was unsettling enough. For young men, the loss of youth and immortality seemed more disheartening and dangerous than any physical condition of warfare. One South African commander insisted that “[w]orst of all, was the constant tension under which they operated both by day and by night. It stretched nerves to breaking point for months on end. A violent contact with SWAPO came almost as a relief” (Breytenbach, *Buffalo* 188). Battle relieved the waiting, the anxiety, but it did not make death less of a concern.

Besides humping through the jungle or the bush in the 'presence of death', guerilla warfare created a myriad of psychological obstacles. Propaganda was one of the key elements of an unconventional war of insurgency – persuade or influence civilians to resist the insurgents or at least persuade your own troops that the insurgents deserve to be

killed. The South African government classified guerrilla warfare "... by the relative unimportance of military operations in the sense of combat operations carried out against opposing armed forces. Rather, the aim of the revolutionary forces is to gain control of government by gaining the support of the people through a combination of intimidation, persuasion and propaganda" (TRC 2: 26). Propaganda was vital to the cause against Communism, and ally and enemy alike attempted to persuade and intimidate the other. Propaganda was the foundation of dehumanizing the enemy, the murder of civilians, as well as insuring that there is no real safe space in a guerilla war.

A logical deduction is that dehumanizing the enemy makes it easier for soldiers to deal with killing the opponent. For soldiers, duty to God, country and home aside, it is easier to kill something that is not human. South Africans and Americans alike were taught that the enemy was subhuman, an animal and only deserving of death. It was easier that way – killing the enemy seems justified and less of a weight on one's conscience. For South Africans the enemy was a "half-human, ill-educated kaffir" (Feinstein 70). For the Americans, "[t]he only thing they told us about the Viet Cong was they were gooks. They were to be killed. Nobody sits around and gives you their historical and cultural background. They're the enemy. Kill, kill, kill. That's what we got in practice. Kill, kill, kill" (qtd. in Terry 5-6). Kill or be killed – a very simple philosophy, as survival seems crystal clear under fire: " 'Either you get killed or you kill him. So, better him than me, any day. You really don't have no feelings about it, you know. You see a dead gook, it don't mean anything' " (qtd. in Laurence 680).

In the Border War, "... the enemy were nothing more than a bunch of heathens misled by their political masters in Moscow, Havana, and Peking" (Feinstein 70). Similarly, in Vietnam, Vietnamese were 'gooks' and became less than human: "Most of us were never able to see the Vietnamese as real people. I remember President Johnson in one of the psy-op [psychological warfare] flicks we saw saying that the communists weren't like us – they didn't have feelings" (qtd. in Santoli 48). The soldier was indoctrinated to believe

that the enemy was helplessly brainwashed by evil Communist masters, as well as being robotic, non-feeling, animals. For some soldiers more than others, this propaganda was not questioned. One soldier admitted, "I enjoyed the shooting and the killing. I was literally turned on when I saw a gook get shot. When a GI got shot, even if I didn't know him – he could be in a different unit than me – that would bother me. A GI was real. American get killed, it was a real loss. But if a gook got killed, it was like me going out here and stepping on a roach" (Baker 66). Yet, some recognized the humanity of their enemy, and confessed that "[t]oo many of us forgot that Vietnamese were people. We didn't treat them like people after a while. It was hard to separate. I really didn't like to mistreat people over there. I tried as hard as I could... not that I didn't from time to time" (173).

For some South Africans, propaganda was nothing new; the NP, church and often family, fed them propaganda well before entering national service. For the Border War, dehumanizing the enemy was a part of civilian life, even before the military. *"The apartheid system itself had grown a generation that viewed blacks as sub-human... In some areas we were exposed on an ongoing basis either to action or to dead bodies. The unrelenting contact with death dehumanised some people"* (qtd. in Draper 182). The enemy in the townships was not seen as much different from the enemy attempting to invade the border, except maybe in proximity. This made the enemy in the townships more menacing and dangerous; most conscripts that served township duty will admit to experiencing a much greater deal of fear and distress in the South African townships than across the border. This is certainly not to generalize and assume that all conscripts were brainwashed by the NP, but for some conscripts, it was a much more natural assimilation from civilian to military propaganda which both dehumanized the enemy:

White South Africans were constantly told by their parents, schools, the media and many churches that black people were different from them and at a lower stage of development. With the emergence of the bantustan scheme, they were told that blacks were not even South Africans. Thus a distinction emerged in their minds about the citizenship of South Africans. Whites were the South Africans while their fellow black residents were now foreigners, temporary sojourners in white South Africa, no different from other disenfranchised migrants working

outside of their home countries. They became 'the other', a short remove from what they were to become, 'the enemy'. An SADF amnesty applicant relates how, on arriving in what was then South West Africa, he and his fellow conscripts were told by their commander, '*Boys, hier gaan julle duisende kaffers doodskiet*' (Boys, here you will shoot dead thousands of 'kaffirs'). (TRC 2: 6)

Propaganda othered the enemy and categorized him not only as dangerous and evil, but as foreign, alien, and worthless. Yet, not all soldiers swallowed this propaganda whole, and certainly after their entire tour or years of national service, will now in hindsight see right through the propaganda. Some soldiers found it more difficult to reconcile their personal belief system with the propaganda proffered by the SADF and US military forces alike. The more human the enemy appeared, the more difficult he was to murder mindlessly, and thinking during a guerilla war was enough to get one killed. One Vietnam vet recalled finding personal pictures and letters on some of the 'gooks' they had just killed:

What we had found gave to the enemy the humanity I wished to deny him. It was comforting to realize that the Viet Cong were flesh and blood instead of the mysterious wraiths I had thought them to be; but this same realization aroused an abiding sense of remorse. These were men we had helped to kill, men whose death would afflict other people with irrevocable loss. (Caputo 124)

Some soldiers could not cope with the way the enemy was dehumanized, as one soldier related how "[w]e got in more trouble for killing water buffalo than we did for killing people. That was something I could never adjust to" (qtd. in Santoli 63). On the other hand, many soldiers began to feel less and less for the enemy as the war went on, perhaps depending on how many close friends they had seen blown away next to them by this enemy.

Propaganda was a strategy that enemy and ally alike implemented. For instance, the ARVN used propaganda to ensure support in the South Vietnamese countryside:

"Sometimes they would bring food out in plastic bags that had a picture of an ARVN riding a white horse, saluting or waving a Vietnamese flag, and the horse trampling a VC

flag... People used to read the bags and start laughing because at best it was probably the stuff that the ARVN stole from the people when they moved them" (qtd. in Santoli 47). The North Vietnamese equally relied on propaganda to affect US black soldiers. One Vietnam soldier "heard stories that the white guys would stay close to the black guys in the field because they thought the VC and NVA didn't shoot at the blacks as much as the whites. And there were signs the Communists put up in the Ashau Valley which told the black soldier this was not his war" (qtd. in Terry 212). For some soldiers, the propaganda of the enemy did have the desired effect. The North Vietnamese would put up signs saying, "'Soul brothers, go home. Whitey raping your mothers and your daughters, burning down your homes. What you over here for? This is not your war. The war is a trick of the Capitalist empire to get rid of the blacks.' I really thought – I really started believing it, because it was too many blacks than there should be in infantry" (qtd. in Terry 39).

One of the most difficult psychological conditions of fighting in Vietnam or Angola/Namibia was the inability to distinguish an ally from the enemy. "You can't tell who's your enemy. You got to shoot kids, you got to shoot women. You don't want to. You may be sorry that you did. But you might be sorrier if you didn't. That's the damn truth" (qtd. in Baker 193). In Vietnam, the Vietnamese people looked similar to outsiders like Americans, just as South Africans were not necessarily able to recognize the difference between a black liberation 'terrorist' and a UNITA ally. When fighting "jungle wars like Vietnam and the African bush wars the distinction between combatants, often dressed like civilians, and civilians, sometimes dressed in some kind of uniform, is frequently blurred. It maybe impossible to tell who is the enemy" (Wolfswinkel 172). At times, the distinction could perhaps be assumed by uniform, but in both wars, civilians and 'terrorists' or communist sympathizers often dressed alike. "It became difficult for the South Africans on the southern banks of the Okavango and Cunene Rivers to determine which troops from which movement they were facing across the border" (Breytenbach, *Buffalo* 20). This can be viewed in terms of physical danger and was a very large obstacle regarding military intelligence and strategy, but this inability to

determine friend from foe was a very acute psychological advantage for the enemy in both Vietnam and the Border Wars.

This blurring of distinctions made it impossible to have a secure space anywhere in the war, for even urban Saigon was a target and the enemy rockets could reach the safety of many border camps. In addition, this constant tension and uneasiness regarding whom to trust was a direct cause of the murder and at times wholesale massacre of civilians.

There was no way for outsiders to tell "... a good Vietnamese from a bad Vietnamese; only *they* can do that. So if you get in there, you're going to end up hating everybody" (qtd. in Willenson 48). The enemy infiltrated the ranks; "... the VC got work inside all the camps as shoeshine boys and laundresses and honey-dippers, they'd starch your fatigues and burn your shit and then go home and mortar your area" (Herr 14). South Africans fighting over the border felt the same depths of frustration:

How can we fight a war like this – a war of insurgency? The man who mortars your camp at night, buries his weapons and uniform, and walks about in civilian clothes by day. He is African... probably an Ovambo himself... so he knows the customs, speaks the language, and is favoured by local hospitality. His intelligence network is far in advance of ours, likewise his opportunities for persuading people of his cause.... (qtd. in Andrew 80)

The fact that the majority of both wars were fought in rural areas compounded this psychological condition. Viet Cong and innocent civilians were farmers or peasants dressed in black pajamas, just as most SWAPO and bipartisan civilians lived in kraals and dressed similarly. There was no such thing as a safe place to set up camp; there was no recognizable difference between enemy farmer and innocent farmer. In the Border War, SWAPO and UNITA supporters looked alike: "The tracker says that they [SWAPO] left the previous morning... *Probably wearing civilian clothes. Watching the passing military vehicles. Standing with a hoe in a field*" (qtd. in Andrew 52). Similarly in Vietnam, "[t]he VC would be the farmer you waved to from your jeep in the day who would be the guy with the gun out looking for you at night... We took more casualties from booby traps than we did from actual combat. The big problem was you couldn't

find the enemy” (qtd. in Santoli 49-50). It is difficult to fight an enemy that you cannot identify much less find.

When the enemy is virtually all around you, undetected, this creates a unique state of anxiety. The rear was just as open to attack as the infantry was. “You could be in the most protected space in Vietnam and still know that your safety was provisional, that early death, blindness, loss of legs, arms or balls, major and lasting disfigurement – the whole rotten deal – could come in on the freakyfluky as easily as in the so-called expected ways...” (Herr 14). The constant state of alert or anxiety was exhausting, especially mentally. “The routine presence of serious danger had the effect of sharpening your perceptions to a fine-edged blade that cut away the requirement for peacetime conventions of manners and etiquette” (Laurence 301). Constant danger became routine; the people who suffered the most because of this tactic of war were the soldiers and the civilians, “...but in a war without front lines, few could feel safe anywhere” (Karnow 465).

The constant struggle to identify or trust the surrounding people created an immense amount of strain and tension that was often released on innocent civilians. Other times, however, it was unleashed on the enemy disguised as an innocent civilian. “One must understand that it’s very easy to slip into a primitive state of mind, particularly if your life is in danger and you can’t trust anyone. It was difficult for me to assimilate both sides of the picture, that maybe some of these villagers really were enemy” (qtd. in Santoli 69). What choice do soldiers have when placed in that pressurized situation? One nurse who served in Vietnam explained why she even found herself hardened to the death of Vietnamese civilians: “That’s war. Children die. You kill them, they kill you. Women kill you, you kill them. That’s it. There’s no Geneva Convention. There’s no rules. There’s nothing” (qtd. in Santoli 144). In fact, in Vietnam, the enemy even infiltrated the ranks of the ARVN allies: “I saw cruelty and brutality that I didn’t expect to see from our own people against the villagers. It took me a while in country to realize why it was happening. In this type of fighting it was almost impossible to know who the enemy was

at any one time. Children were suspect, women were suspect” (qtd. in Santoli 69). Similarly, the South African “*Security Forces* [who were closely affiliated with the SADF] *would stop at nothing to force information out of people. They break into homes, beat up residents, shoot people, steal and kill cattle and often pillage stores and tea rooms... People are blindfolded, taken from their homes and left beaten up and even dead by the roadside. Women are often raped*” (qtd. in TRC 2: 73).

The inability to tell enemy from ally was an unfortunate element of guerilla warfare. The frustrations associated with being unable to identify or locate the enemy eventually build to a pressure point. Therefore, when soldiers were ordered to kill a tangible ‘enemy’ in front of them, many took this chance to vent a pent-up mix of anger, fear or frustration. This often resulted in the deaths of innocent civilians, in the case of both American and South African soldiers. However brutal this policy seems, some may argue that it was essential to surviving both mentally and physically in guerrilla war. The atrocities committed on all sides in the Vietnam and Border Wars will never be fully documented.

There are, however, two infamous massacres which merit close comparison considering how eerily compatible the surrounding details are. The ‘massacres’ at Kassinga in Angola and at My Lai in Vietnam are evidence of the extent of torture and terror employed in guerrilla warfare as a result of not being able to distinguish friend from foe. These massacres summon endless debate about the role of personal morality and responsibility in warfare. Some argue it is criminal to prosecute or criticize soldiers for doing their duty or carrying out orders, and that warfare in general or orders from top military command or sanctions from politicians are to blame instead. Others argue that soldiers should have the individual, moral fortitude to know that the wholesale slaughter of unarmed women, children and old men who are not resisting is wrong. Regardless of the moral debate about who should assume responsibility for such atrocities, these massacres happened. Whether one views them as massacres, tragedies, incidents or events, My Lai and Kassinga are at the very least a clear image of what young soldiers in

guerilla warfare are capable of. I have personally chosen the word ‘massacre,’ considering the number of civilians killed in such a small amount of time.

The main points of comparison between Kassinga and My Lai are clear. There were approximately four hundred civilians killed in My Lai and 612 civilians confirmed by Angolan authorities were killed at Kassinga (Nangolo 36). There were mass executions involving women, old men and babies, who were thrown into ditches or mass graves. There were attempts at high-ranking military and political levels to cover up the truth or statistics about both massacres. The main difference is that Kassinga was not publicized and investigated nearly to the extent that My Lai was. For the American press, the My Lai massacre and its investigation were an enormous scandal, where soldiers were put on trial and on television. Another difference is that in Kassinga there was no evidence of rape, sodomy or bizarre acts done to the civilians like the documented depravity Charlie Company inflicted in My Lai.

Kassinga was named ‘Operation Reindeer’ and for some, “[t]his military operation, sanctioned by Prime Minister Vorster and carried out by some of South Africa’s top military commanders, can only be described as a cowardly blood-bath of mainly defenceless women and children” (Nangolo 35). One such top South African commander, Col. Jan Breytenbach would not necessarily agree that the civilians were ‘defenceless’. The opposing point of view states that:

The para strike against Cassinga was mounted on 4 May. Although it developed into a much harder fight than expected, it was a complete success with at least 608 SWAPO fighters killed. South African casualties were four dead and eleven wounded. It was the largest operational para drop since World War-2... the Cassinga attack created an international uproar, with SWAPO maintaining the base was a refugee camp. Colonel Breytenbach disagreed, insisting that the fighting was fierce, often eyeball to eyeball, and if they were refugees ‘they were the best armed and best trained ones’ he had come across. (qtd. in Stiff 205-06)

Although operational orders for Reindeer indicated that “ ‘women and children must, where possible, not be shot’ ” (qtd. in TRC 2: 53), it does not seem that these orders were

followed. Nevertheless, General J. Geldenhuys considers that “[i]t (Kassinga) was a jewel of military craftsmanship” (qtd. in TRC 2: 44), but one wonders how the slaughter of six hundred civilians could be seen as precious? The facts indicate that “[i]n human rights terms, the SADF raid on Kassinga, which killed over 600 people, is possibly the single most controversial external operation of the Commission’s mandate period” (2: 46). Whether the six hundred or so dead civilians were armed or unarmed remains a mystery, but “[t]here is little evidence that the SADF took sufficient precautions to spare those civilians whom they knew were resident at Kassinga in large numbers” (2: 53). No SADF military personnel were held accountable for the massacre and Kassinga is written into SADF history as one of the most successful paratrooper missions since WWII.

Whereas Kassinga was tactically planned with paratroopers being dropped and with tanks and reinforcements thereafter to combat a presence of military operations, My Lai in Vietnam was a search-and-destroy mission gone wrong in an area that offered little or no military threat. Both ended in a massacre of civilians, and even though the men of Charlie Company were significantly fewer in number and firepower, they managed to kill almost the same number of civilians and in less time than Kassinga. My Lai was initially reported as a victory. “‘US TROOPS SURROUND REDS, KILL 128,’ was the headline printed in the Pacific edition of *Stars and Stripes* two days later. According to the story there had been a bloody battle in which a company of GIs was locked in heavy fighting with an unknown-size communist force” (Bilton and Sim 182). However, after the story broke, the Peers Commission Report of 1970 changed the official position on My Lai considerably:

During the period 16-19 March 1968, US Army troops of Task Force Barker, 11th Brigade, Americal [sic] Division, massacred a large number of noncombatants in two hamlets of Son My Village, Quang Ngai Province, Republic of Vietnam. The precise number of Vietnamese killed cannot be determined but was at least 175 and may exceed 400. (1)

Unlike Kassinga, there is no military commander on the record saying that My Lai was an extraordinary piece of military policy in action. However, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Barker, the task force commander, appeared “totally unworried about the civilian deaths”

at the briefing of his division the night of the massacre (176). He was quoted as saying, “As far as I am concerned it was combat... It was tragic that we killed these women and children but it was in a combat operation and that is what I will report...” (176). Charlie Company found only three weapons that day, which begs the question, what exactly constituted ‘combat’ in a situation where civilians were not armed and did not return fire?

Most importantly, the individual accounts of the soldiers of both Kassinga and My Lai are strikingly similar. The confusion and trauma experienced by the paratroopers at Kassinga and Charlie Company at My Lai are a common thread woven through all the accounts. They expressed being torn between duty and morals, between their training and their consciences. One South African soldier confessed:

We were in enemy territory and had to get the hell out of there as quickly as possible. There were just too many wounded. We could have left them on the battlefield to die in pain and agony. We couldn't.

I was given an AK-47 and instructed to kill those who couldn't be saved. I had to decide who was not going to live. I was the company leader, so I had to take the lead.

I don't know how many people I shot that day. Some were conscious, some were not.

We found this woman clutching her screaming baby. It was only when we tore the child away, that we saw the terrible wounds inflicted by an Air Force bomb. There was no hope for her. I had to shoot her. She looked at me. I can never describe what it did to me. It was too much. I later broke down. (qtd. in Heywood 35)

Similarly, in My Lai, after they opened fire, the soldiers systematically finished off the survivors. One GI would later described how “[t]hey just marched through shooting everybody... they had them in a group standing in front of a ditch, just like a Nazi-type thing. One officer ordered a kid to machine gun everybody down” (Bilton and Sim 254). Another soldier recalled:

I went to turn her over and there was a little baby with her that I had also killed. The baby's face was half gone. My mind just went. The training came to me and I just started killing. Old men, women, children, water buffaloes, everything. We were told to leave nothing standing. We did what we were told, regardless of whether they were civilians. They was the enemy... You didn't have to look for people to kill, they were just there. I cut their throats, cut off their hands, cut out

their tongue, their hair, scalped them” (qtd. in Bilton and Sim 130).

Rape, sodomy, disembowelment, mutilation of innocents are all in the accounts of My Lai; the degree of terror and violence performed by such a small number of men seems more brutal with regards to My Lai than what is known of Kassinga.

War is not humane. War is about survival and murder and mutilation; soldiers are sent to kill. However, the My Lai and Kassinga massacres unearth much more than a shocking reminder of what guerilla war can manifest. The “difference between an atrocity and the unfortunate effects of war” does not seem clear and the distinction between duty and morality becomes blurred (Bilton and Sim 223). At the end of the day, it is difficult for even those in command to justify how slaughter tactics such as Kassinga or My Lai validated or aided in the crusade against Communism. It could be argued that Kassinga and My Lai are very clear examples of what to expect when intervening in another country’s civil war, or else what is indicative of the effects on the psyche of combatants in guerrilla warfare in general. In the SADF it was described as going ‘bossies’ or ‘bosbefok’ (Wolfswinkel 172), and in Vietnam it was diagnosed as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Although they are extreme examples of the nature of guerrilla warfare, it is certainly not a coincidence that such similar massacres occurred in both wars.

Chapter Four

RACE and CLASS: Brothers in Arms – First Class Dying and Second Class Living

Issues of race are very pertinent to comparisons between the Vietnam War and the Border War. Although there are some major differences in what role race or racism played in both wars, the experience of combat proved to be both an educator and equalizer at some level for both Americans and South Africans. There is a qualitative difference between racist policy at a government level and racism in the field, just as there is a quantitative difference between how many racially mixed units operated in the Border War as opposed to in Vietnam. Racism in the field or during combat and racism experienced in the rear echelon are two completely different issues. Racism was also a collective experience for all races of American troops, but this time racism was directed at the enemy. In addition, racial issues were often mistaken for what really came down to distinctions of class or ethnicity. Lastly, military service and more specifically combat situations often proved to be a sort of sociological laboratory, where young men were exposed to and educated about people of certain race, region, background or beliefs that they were unaware of before entering the military.

Soldiers in war may have different skin color, but experience the same trauma of waging guerilla warfare. When referring to any of his fellow soldiers, one black Vietnam vet would "... use the term 'brother' because in a war circumstance, we all brothers" (qtd. in Terry 242). Although many soldiers of color, whether black⁶ or so-called 'Coloured' South African troops, faced discrimination in and out of the field, overall, soldiers on both sides of the color divide described combat as a leveler. The sense of loyalty to each other outweighed any prior beliefs or prejudices, as a book by Ernie Pyle suggested: "The ties that grow between men who live savagely together, relentlessly communing with Death, are ties of great strength. There is a sense of fidelity to each other in a little

⁶ I have chose the term 'black' to refer to African-American soldiers, as my dissertation does not refer to the oral accounts of other soldiers of color such as Native American, Hispanic or Asian-American are considerably represented in oral histories. There are, in fact, far fewer accounts from these groups available. Sources written by and about black veterans also unanimously utilize the racial classification, 'black'.

corps of men who have endured so long, and whose hope in the end can be so small' ” (qtd. in Laurence 553). Yet, although the consensus of black or Coloured soldiers claimed that combat often took precedence over racism, there were certainly some soldiers who experienced discrimination both during combat and in the rear. Racism was an unnecessary weight on soldiers who were struggling just to survive the war. One soldier explained:

So they get over there, get introduced to the drugs, the killings, the uncertainty, and they still had to put up with racism within the service. They were there to kill and be killed. About ready to die. To do first-class dying. Yet in terms of their assignments and promotions and awards, they were getting second-class treatment. It created a special brand of bitterness... But those who experienced racism in a war we lost wear a scar. (qtd. in Terry 199)

Black or Coloured soldiers bear a different type of scar that comes from 'second-class treatment' as they confronted the marked difference between 'first class dying' and second class living, both during service and especially upon returning home. This was especially apropos for the black Angolan and Namibian tribes and Bushmen utilized by the SADF as almost expendable to fight in place of a wide-scale commitment of white conscripts. South Africa was willing to get fully involved, but with the majority of the contact seen by these black 'foreign' troops.

One of the main differences between experiences of black soldiers in Vietnam and black or Coloured soldiers in the Border War was the number of such soldiers that fought for the SADF during the war. Apartheid and the politics of the NP government complicate a comparison. “There were no black combat troops in the South African Army because it was unacceptable to the ruling National Party’s political constituency” (Breytenbach, *Buffalo* 182). Mandatory national service was only implemented for white citizens, and was not extended to Coloured, Indian or Black South Africans, as they were for the most part not even recognized as citizens, much less human beings. A small percentage of black and Coloured South Africans volunteered as career soldiers in the SACC (South African Coloured Corps) or the Zulu Battalion. The remaining black or Coloured South African soldiers were deemed ‘terrorists’ or ‘insurgents’ by the SADF and often trained

to fight their own guerilla war both inside and outside South African borders. Although these soldiers often experienced the same extent of combat trauma, as well as the silencing of the return home, for this dissertation I will limit my comparison to the black soldiers who served in the 32-Battalion.⁷

Of the oral histories and military accounts of the Border War, many journalists, ex-soldiers or historians still insist that the Border War was not about race, but about Communism, which happened, coincidentally, to be backing black liberation movements of South Africa and neighboring states. One such journalist explains that “[t]o those who did not know better – and to some who did, but found it more convenient to avoid facing the facts – the border war was a simple confrontation between racist whites and oppressed blacks” (Venter 138). It is not surprising that the ANC’s opinion, voiced through the TRC, is in direct contradiction to this journalist’s classification of the Border War. The opposing point of view states that,

The Commission [TRC] is, therefore, of the view that factors of race and racism should not be dismissed when attempting to explain South Africa’s conduct in the region. It finds it difficult to believe, for example, that Koevoet would have been allowed to operate on a bounty basis, or that the SADF would have killed over 600 people, many of them children and women, in the Kassinga camp in Angola, had their targets been white. From the evidence before the Commission, it appears that, while some acts of regional destabilization may have been a defence against Communism, the purpose of the war was also to preserve white minority rule in South Africa and was, therefore, a race war. (TRC 2: 43-44)

I do agree that the Border War was not only a race war, and does involve other factors, such as the Cold War, foreign intervention, and Angola’s tribal and ethnic civil war. But

⁷ Even though the 32-Battalion was comprised of Angolan blacks and not South African blacks or Coloureds, these troops were eventually recognized as operating as part of the SADF, and fought as a cohesive, racially integrated unit. The Coloured Corps and the SWA Territory Forces were also comprised of white officers leading black or Coloured soldiers, but they do not serve this comparison as well as the 32-Battalion with well-documented combat experience. The perspective of the other integrated units would be invaluable to a more in-depth look at race and the Border War. These troops also need to be explored in terms of race and their military experience, but to explore racism with regards to MK, POQO, the Coloured Corps and the SWA Territory Forces is another thesis in and of itself.

even the components of Angola's civil war are inextricably linked with race and ethnicity. Thus, the Border War certainly must be analyzed in the context of a race war – but a race war with many additional complications.

Some South African conscripts or citizens may have wondered or still contemplate, “Was this a racist army pursuing a race war?” (Andrew 100) As mentioned before, one would be unlikely to come across many conscripts who admit to having supported or who still support the old NP government and its military policies. “Race was a powerful organising framework, drawn on, to varying degrees, by all parties in the conflict” (TRC 2: 6). Both sides of the Border War identified the enemy according to race, as is evident in the testimony of an Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) commander: “*The enemy of the liberation movement of South Africa and of its people was always the settler colonial regime of South Africa... The pillars of apartheid protecting white South Africa from the black danger, were the military and the process of arming of the entire white South African society*” (qtd. in TRC 2: 6). Some ‘historians’ even tell stories of triumph or defeat in terms of vague, sweeping stereotypes: “It appeared that many of the enemy had hastily tried to discard all evidence that they were members of FAPLA, no doubt to avoid the merciless apartheid Boers committed to killing them out of hand” (Breytenbach, *Buffalo* 102). Lines were drawn in the sand according to race and affiliation for both sides, including the war waged in the townships.

Even the standard training procedures for SADF medics were rife with racism. “*The first time that many of the medics performed any medical procedures was in black hospitals because ‘frankly it didn’t matter if we made a mistake because they were black people.’*” (qtd. in TRC 4: 122). It can be argued that it was easy for white South African conscripts simply to apply what they were taught about the ‘subhuman’ blacks they lived alongside to the blacks across the border. Many conscripts recall the racism that was passed from the top down:

‘You can say what you like about the army,’ wrote Richard Aldington, ‘they treat you like a gentleman when you’re dead.’ While that may have applied to the

British Army it did not quite hold true in the South African military. Not if you were black that is... Three South African soldiers had been killed and the atmosphere was subdued as the body bags were off-loaded. A captain, his curiosity aroused by the site of the three bags laid out in crumpled form next to one another, gingerly opened the first and peered in. Expressionless, he moved on the second and then the third. Straightening up, his face creased into a smile.

'*Ag, net swartes, just blacks,*' he muttered, and ambled off in the direction of the canteen.

The episode epitomised the attitude of many in the military to the Namibian conflict and it was into such an environment that conscripts were sent to complete their stint of 'border duty'. (Feinstein 3)

The way that the troops were indoctrinated to regard the enemy was also linked to racism, and similar to the experience of troops in Vietnam, except that the difference in demographics of troops in both wars puts a different spin on this propaganda of collective racism. In Vietnam, white and black troops collectively used 'gooks' and such racial slurs to dehumanize the enemy, but for the majority of the time in the SADF, the white conscripts were dehumanizing a black enemy. The collective racism of American soldiers against their Vietnamese enemy does not directly compare with the Border War. Yet, South African "[c]onscripts also spoke about the racist views that were evident in the army: '*...every black man is a suspect, every black man is the enemy... must kill him*'" (qtd. in Draper 180). The Border War certainly revolved around issues of race complicated by ideology and political climate, and this is further evidenced by the fact that white conscripts were assigned township duty instead of border camps – the race war raging within South Africa was treated the same as the war waged on the border. As mentioned above, conscripts often feared township duty much more than a tour on the border. The legacy of white supremacy extended to include township violence as well as border duty. One conscript admitted that "[t]ownship duty was scary. Much more scary. I did one township camp and blessedly only one month. And it was much more scary because you didn't know who your enemy was" (PB). This conscript candidly reveals how the racial turmoil inside his own borders frightened him more than the supposed threat of the invasion of 'black danger'.

Another important difference between race within combat in both wars was the extent to which South Africa purposefully ‘recruited’ or forcibly trained ex-FNLA Angolan soldiers to go back into Angola and kill their own countrymen. For the closely aligned National Party and the SADF “[t]he solution...was to recruit blacks to fight against their own kith and kin. In particular, special commandos were recruited under the control of the security police” (Birmingham 56). Some black Americans and veterans argued that sending a greater proportion of black soldiers into the infantry was a masked attempt by the U.S. government to wipe out the black population of young men. “...[B]lack casualties in Vietnam far exceeded white casualties in proportion to black representation among Americans... But the tendency to channel blacks into the infantry, to be sent to Vietnam, to serve overlong in combat units...” will be further examined in my following section in terms of how racism caused certain economic oppression, which indirectly caused many black Americans to be more susceptible to the draft or to volunteering (Goff, Stanley and Smith ix). This argument reflects South Africa’s policy of using “over 200 black Angolan soldiers – Boer cannon fodder” (Birmingham 43).

Additionally, using a broader definition of ‘non-white’, both wars could be compared according to brother fighting against brother. In the Border War, blacks fought against their black brothers in the case of the 32-Battalion and Koevoet; in Vietnam, there were black soldiers waging war against a race of ‘non-white’ people. This comparison is tenuous, but there certainly is common ground between utilizing ‘non-white’ soldiers to fight against ‘non-white’ enemies. Although Vietnam cannot be technically viewed in terms of a ‘race war’, the United States military is certainly not above being deemed a racist institution. Some black Vietnam vets suggest that “...the system was set up in such a way as to perpetuate racism...” (qtd. in Terry 187).

One of the similar patterns that emerges while reading accounts written about or written by black soldiers is that loyalty to one’s unit in combat precedes any other concerns of race or class. If survival was the ultimate priority for most soldiers, then loyalty to the unit was supreme. Ironically, the accounts of Colonel Jan Breytenbach are also told from a white, liberal point of view – and he accuses everyone else around him and his unit of

racism, but claims there was none within the 32-Battalion itself. Breytenbach, first and foremost a soldier, puts this above all other loyalties, and his accounts of the 32-Battalion repeatedly emphasize that the notions of race, class or language are equalized in combat. Everyone is in the same position; everyone is vulnerable. This theory of combat as the great leveler is also repeatedly echoed in black soldiers' accounts of Vietnam.

Unfortunately, since I did not come across any narrative written from the first person perspective of any black Angolans from the 32-Battalion, one has to skeptically rely on Breytenbach account.⁸

Soldiers in guerilla wars experienced constant anticipation of crisis. The terrain was relentless, the ally was unreliable, and booby traps and landmines abounded. One of the few constants that many soldiers relied on was the support of the men around them. One Vietnam vet "... found out that bullshit is not an indicator of what you're going to do under stress. It's so artificial, the world we live in. And in the service, tall, short, thin, fat, good-looking, homely, ugly – it didn't matter. Name, color – it meant nothing under combat. Bullets have no discrimination" (qtd. in Santoli 121). When in a crisis situation, the survival instinct took over, and this was certainly consistent in combat. Bullets and buddies both seemed to disregard racial discrimination after a while. Some black Vietnam soldiers insisted that "[t]he black/white relationship was tense. I saw a couple of fistfights... I saw this happen in the field, as a matter of fact" (qtd. in Santoli 72). There were, thus, cases where in the heat of combat, racism was felt.

Yet, overall, many black GIs claim that most of the racism they incurred was in the rear, where the immediacy of crisis was toned down considerably. "But for the guys in the bush, the grunts, you know, one of my best friends was a white guy. There was no racism between him and me, nothing like that. That was mostly back in the rear. Out in the bush everybody was the same. You can't find no racism in the bush. We slept

⁸ A TV documentary, *Prime Evil* (directed and produced by Jacques Pauw in 1996) incorporated an interview with a black Angolan, who fought for Eugene de Kock in Koevoet. It offers unique insight into

together, ate together, fought together. What else can you ask for?" (Santoli 157) In a similar way, Breytenbach made distinctions between racism outside versus racism within his 32-Battalion. His battalion was nicknamed " 'Jan's Kaffirs' " (qtd. in Breytenbach, *Buffalo* 149); Breytenbach claims that they were "...a bloody nuisance. That, as far as Sector 20 at Rundu was concerned, was the bottom line. The lives of Jan Breytenbach's 'kaffirs', as they called them, counted for very little, whether they were in or out of contact with the enemy" (qtd in Breytenbach, *Buffalo* 148). In fact, it took a long time for the SADF to recognize the 32-Battalion as affiliates, and Breytenbach admitted that "...it was difficult to say the least, selling the concept of an infantry unit composed of black regular soldiers officered by white South Africans, to the political hierarchy of the day" (Breytenbach, *Sword* 73).

The 32-Battalion was closely aligned with the 31-Battalion, which was comprised mostly of Bushmen. "...[T]he bulk of the approximately 350 !Xu and Khwe were forcibly recruited into 31 Battalion. One of the !Xu leaders, Mr Agostinho Victorino, is quoted as saying they were given two choices by the South African military – 'either join the army or we'll bomb your villages' " (TRC 2: 23). These Bushmen, like much of the Vietnamese peasant population, as well as the Vietnamese montagnards, had no real choice. Breytenbach highlighted the lack of choice that the Bushmen and other black Angolans faced: "Their choices were limited. They could either become soldiers, with some sort of a immediate future, or continue as refugees with a very doubtful future" (Breytenbach, *Sword* 71). Membership and allegiance to the 32-Battalion did provide them and their families food, shelter and some protection, but this membership also proved deadly for many of these soldiers. For all members of the 32, the casualty rate was very high: "...the soldiers knew they would be required to fight and go on fighting until they were wounded, killed or became physically unfit or too old to continue... Their roll of honour became by far the longest of any South African unit. In fact, I believe it was longer than the rolls of all other infantry units combined" (Breytenbach, *Buffalo*

issues of race and combat. However, the controversy surrounding both the Security Forces and de Kock himself would overly complicate this discussion

133).

The 32-Battalion is an interesting case study in racism, because South Africans trained black Angolans to fight against other black Angolans. During combat, Breytenbach asserted that “[t]hose of us in Battle Group Bravo, however, never regarded our black soldiers as cannon fodder. Far from it... There was no race, tribal or national distinction. We fought as members of Battle Group Bravo. We mucked in equally from top to bottom. Our very lives depended on our mutual support in combat situations” (Breytenbach, *Buffalo* 132-33). He was realistic in terms of the motivations for these black soldiers to fight on the side of the SADF. “To suggest they fight for the country – South Africa, would have been preposterous... There could be only one cause they could fight for, which was the Unit” (Breytenbach, *Sword* 72). This concept was universal and many black or Coloured soldiers from both wars would agree that, “Most fought for a cause they didn’t understand. But it was not a cause they died for, they died for the Battalion and for the men fighting on their left and right flanks, their comrades in arms, their comrades in sorrow and their comrades in laughter. It was a cause any soldier will understand” (Breytenbach, *Sword* 264). Vietnam veterans also echoed this notion of mutual exclusivity in combat. One American soldier claimed that there was no racism in combat: “... ‘you’re covering each other’s asses. And, so, man, there’s no room for it, no room for it at all. You’re protecting him and he’s protecting you. And that’s what you’re both here for’ ” (qtd. in Laurence 594). Another black officer in Vietnam admitted that there was racism in the field, “[b]ut I never let any of these things make me prejudiced right back. Especially in combat. Especially in Vietnam. I am the sergeant major. I take care of all my men, black and white” (qtd. in Terry 150).

Soldiers may have encountered racism in the field or in the rear, but the majority of the accounts written by or about them indicate that in combat situations, prejudices eventually become both redundant and irrelevant. There was usually no room or no time for racism – they were too busy surviving. This combat camaraderie seems logical, but

the comparison between the 32-Battalion and the black Vietnam troops still begs the question, why did these men fight for the white majority (America) or for the white minority (South Africa) in the first place? Most of them felt as if they had no other choice – whether drafted in America, threatened by South African officers or faced with a bleak refugee existence. Many black American troops expressed how “[w]e felt that the American Dream didn’t really serve us. What we experienced was the American Nightmare” (Goff, Stanley and Smith iiix). The 32-Battalion were exploited under the South African NP political stance that “...it was more expedient to have foreign blacks killed in battle than to send young white South African National Servicemen home in body bags” (Breytenbach, *Buffalo* 132). The black Angolans or Bushmen were granted South African citizenship, only to be relegated to an alienated piece of land in the Free State.³ The South African government clearly put forth a message that “... they were good enough to fight and die for the ‘cause’ but living together with whites was anathema” (Feinstein 36). America and South Africa alike did not seem to serve their veterans in general, and certainly not the black or Coloured returning soldiers.

Race versus Region, Ethnicity and Class

Race was not the only indicator that was wiped cleanly off the slate in combat; issues of class, regional, or ethnic division were also elided. One Vietnam soldier noticed that:

[u]sual measures of personal worth like family background, education, job status, looks, material wealth and social standing that meant so much in the United States were not important in the field. Courage, steady nerves, humor, strength, reliability, comradeship, generosity and teamwork were... Wartime behavior not only defined character, it created new dimensions of it, new opportunities for expression. (Laurence 377)

This notion of combat facilitating a race harmony and blurring class distinctions would be included in such a ‘new opportunity for expression’. It is almost as if combat forcibly placed issues of race, class, or ethnicity on a temporary hiatus. It is naïve to say that racial discrimination and ingrained beliefs were obliterated for all soldiers. Often, after they survived the crisis, endured combat and prevailed, this equalizing spell was broken and racism and class issues returned (although some never saw the opposite race in the

same light afterwards).

Often, issues of race would be confused with class distinctions, regional affiliations or ethnicity. Class and geographic divisions in both American and South African societies were tightly bound with the draft or conscription. Many black or Coloured soldiers saw the military as a way to move up in economic and social standing. One American soldier admitted, “[a]nd I, through the only way I could possibly make it out of the ghetto, was to be the best soldier I possibly could” (qtd. in Terry 238-39). The same goes for the Angolan blacks allowed South African citizenship, food, and shelter as a result of service. The Vietnam War “... was fought by the children of the slums, of farmers, mechanics, and construction workers. The debate was waged by elites. The establishment that got us involved in Vietnam did not send its sons and daughters there; in fact, its sons and daughters were in the fore-front of the antiwar movement” (Caputo 349). The same applies to South African conscription; it took money to avoid the draft, as most people who avoided service could afford a university education. Draft and conscription were tied into issues of class division:

‘All it costs is a couple a hundred bucks in the right hands. It’s a big scam. Nobody goes to Vietnam. Just spades from the ghettos mostly and poor whites from the South.’

‘What about Hispanics?’ I said.

‘Them too,’ he laughed. (qtd. in Laurence 422)

In the case of the Vietnam War, class separations were confounded with racial divide. For instance, the view that the US government sent black soldiers as a disguised attempt at genocide revolves around the assumption that most black soldiers in Vietnam were drafted. However, many black soldiers enlisted, for economic and social reasons. “A few of us black soldiers were able to get into positions where we could have some freedom, make our lives a little better, even though we were in a war that we didn’t really believe in. But most blacks couldn’t, because they didn’t have the skills. So they were put in the jobs that were the most dangerous, the hardest, or just the most undesirable” (qtd. in Terry 212-13). It is true that black Americans may have had far fewer

opportunities due to the racism endemic in America, but their enlistment was also, ironically, part of a class struggle. Due to economic hardship, many young Americans volunteered: “For many black men, the service, even during a war, was the best of a number of alternatives to staying home and working in the fields or bumming around the streets of Chicago or New York” (qtd. in Terry 221).

Regional division was often part and parcel of class division. During the Vietnam War, there were still prejudices about the North and the South – Civil War leftovers. Conscripts in the Border War also were divided according to region. Issues of geography and ethnicity apply to the Border War, since conscription saw a lot of culturally diverse white South African males thrown together. For instance, conscripts would disagree on account of their diverse regional backgrounds; one conscript would dislike another “...because he came from the Bluff and played soccer, while major Mills was from Musgrave and favoured rugby” (qtd. in Andrew 87). This type of regional division does relate to race or ethnicity especially in the case of the black or Coloured soldiers who chose or were recruited into SADF service. The Kavango troops and the Coloured Corps at Rundu did not gel, and neither did the Bushmen with any other black tribe (SD). Similarly, the SADF was comprised of soldiers with diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds that often clashed. Many individuals sought to continue the Boer War of the English versus the Afrikaners. The colonial legacy in South Africa left serious striations between cultures and backgrounds.

Issues involving ethnicity and class structure were also at the foundation of both civil wars in which America and South Africa intervened. Angola’s civil war was a colonial leftover, with ethnic and tribal loyalties as well as access to citizenship and economic opportunities at the center of the internal strife. In Angola, racism and class structure went hand in hand, since the “[c]onflict between white planters and merchants and dispossessed black peasants was the basis of the nationalist war of the 1960s” (Birmingham 45). The root of the civil war revolved around privilege that was granted

according to race or ethnicity. This conflict, which stemmed from Portuguese colonial rule, saw tension between the *mestiço* people (the offspring of African and European parents) who were granted automatic citizenship and the other individuals, mainly black peasants, who had little chance of gaining citizenship (Guimarães 24). “Racism thus became one of the first driving forces of political mobilisation” in Angola (18). In Vietnam, the Montagnard tribe was considered a less deserving race and class: “the Vietnamese thought the montagnard was an inferior human being. They treated the montagnards worse than animals” (Cornett 182). Class division was the other driving force behind the civil strife. Class struggle was evident in Vietnam, as more educated citizens who migrated North with access to education, and leftovers from the colonizers (whether the Chinese, French, or even Americans in some cases) did not involve themselves with the plight of the poor peasants in the South. Regional difference combined with class striations was also a large factor in the Vietnamese civil conflict.

In matters of regional, racial, ethnic and class division, war becomes a giant social experiment, as it mentally strips men down to the bare essentials. Soldiers admired fellow soldiers according to another set of criteria – a code of ethics, honor, bravery, loyalty, and grace under fire. What color they were, where they came from, what kind of job or how much money they had was irrelevant in war situations. Combat was not only the ultimate leveler, but it also served as a sort of education ground, a school where soldiers were exposed to young men of all walks of life. One Vietnam soldier pointed out that, “[t]he first white friend I had, I had in Vietnam. We were really very different, but we thought each other had something going for him that made us special... It was like I will show you what rednecks are like, then I’ll show you what niggers are about” (Terry 119). War provided some men with a type of education that they would never have received otherwise. In the Border War, and more specifically in the 32-Battalion, soldiers were also exposed to people of different races, creeds, backgrounds and beliefs than what they had known before the military. In Col. Jan Breytenbach’s unit, he demanded that troops as well as the white officers learn to fight side by side. “This meant, of course, that whites entering the unit also had to change their outlook. What I

demanded from them was a total unselfish commitment to the unit, particularly to the black troops..." (Breytenbach, *Buffalo* 72). Overall, combat offered men a unique opportunity to learn a great deal about life, and for some under such educational exposure, prior prejudices simply disintegrated. This was the camaraderie and bond that comes out of war situations. This bond was what made young men able to face the hardships of guerilla warfare as well as endure the adjustment when returning home. And for some, this unity even changed their entire perspective on race, class and divisions or differences.

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Chapter Five

THE RETURN HOME

Many soldiers of the Vietnam and Border Wars bear both visible and invisible scars, as these wars inflicted both visible, physical wounds and handicaps, and psychological, more invisible wounds. “Most GIs returned from Vietnam quietly and unobtrusively, blending back into the population. But the war crippled an unusually high proportion of them, physically and mentally, in ways that are not quickly visible” (Karnow 25). Not all the effects of war are apparent, especially when coupled with a collective silencing of returning soldiers. During as well as after combat, “[t]hey’d talk about physical wounds in one way and psychic wounds in another” (Herr 59). Many soldiers returned home with an amputated spirit or a dismembered soul, which can be as difficult to heal as amputated body parts. One soldier argued that “it took ten years for our bodies to catch up to where our heads were. All of a sudden you feel this psychological pain become physical pain” (qtd. in Terry 128). Concerning casualties, it is difficult to classify soldiers into types or categories. A soldier’s body as well as his mind, morals, and innocence all are casualties of war:

I already regarded myself as a casualty of the war, a moral casualty, and like all serious casualties, I felt detached from everything. I felt very much like a man who has lost a leg or an arm, and knowing he will never have to fight again, loses all interest in the war that has wounded him. As his physical energies are spent on overcoming his pain and on repairing his body injuries, so were all of my emotional energies spent on maintaining my mental balance... All my inner reserves had been committed to that battle for emotional and mental survival. I had nothing left for other struggles. (Caputo 332)

Many returning soldiers came to represent to the nation a band of soldiers who lost. This broad classification of ‘lost soldiers’ encompasses soldiers who served throughout the span of two or three different decades in Vietnam, Namibia and Angola. The experience of the conscript in the sixties on the Angolan border was vastly different from those who served in Operation Savannah in the seventies or did township duty in the eighties. Similarly, in Vietnam, the advisors who were in Vietnam in the fifties may not identify with the experiences of the first Marines hitting the shores of Danang in the sixties, or the

soldiers who fought in the Battle of Hué or in the Tet offensive of the late sixties to early seventies. From one perspective, it is unfair to simply lump together all these soldiers who fought in a different phase of each war and thus returned to very distinct social and political climates at home. However, no matter when exactly each soldier returned home, all soldiers can relate to when the political or social tide of public opinion turned against them after the war ended. This exploration of the return home after both countries withdrew from their wars attempts to find a common ground. The soldiers were forced to accept that “Marines don’t talk about Vietnam. We lost. They never talk about losing. So it’s just wiped out, all of that’s off the slate, it doesn’t count. It makes you a little bitter” (qtd. in Santoli 29). These were unpopular wars by the end, and young men who sacrificed both body and mind in war cannot comprehend why they are received so coldly, so indifferently: “When I was nineteen, I know I didn’t know too much about what’s goin’ on. Except you s’posed to fight for your country. And you come home. But where is my country when I come home?” (qtd. in Terry 235) How can soldiers help but to take this rejection personally? Soldiers faced re-entering civilian life as well as “...the fact that you’re not going to get any pats on the back, you’re not going to get a parade, you’re not going to get anything but spit on and misunderstood and blamed – I still feel that sometimes. Maybe I could have done better” (qtd. in Santoli 260).

War invaded the minds of the young men who served as well as their bodies, and these visible or invisible wounds also invaded the consciousness of the nation. The “...legions of young men served one year and brought their memories home. The country at large was exposed to a kind of carnal knowledge once reserved to the troops alone, and it found the experience so revolting that it turned against both the war and the warriors. It is worth hearing some soldiers’ tales, if only because they convey so plainly the feelings of the times” (qtd. in Willenson 53). Thus, the returning soldiers instantly became lost, as their nation projected onto them all that was wrong with the war. The soldiers’ feeling of dislocation was only reiterated by the rejection of their countrymen: “I felt bad. I felt cold. I felt like I was completely out of it” (qtd. in Terry 117). Their homecoming was met with protest, or just indifferent silence. One soldier admits, “I just couldn’t adjust to

it. Couldn't adjust to coming back home, and people think you dirty 'cause you went to Vietnam" (qtd. in Terry 33). Bitterness and betrayal replaced relief at having survived and returned: "I suffered the perennial anger of the returned soldier. The sense of betrayal, easily triggered... I would happily have turned my guns on some of my so-called 'fellow country-men' " (Andrew 191).

In the midst of all this projection and rejection, and since there is no triumph, no national glory and honor bestowed on the returning soldiers, survival was the only experience that soldiers can cherish. Even during combat, survival was what brought men of different races, beliefs and backgrounds together, and what made propaganda and programmed ideologies seem irrelevant. "You didn't think politics when you were out there. It was just basically survival. I knew I was there for a year. I knew what date I was going to be coming home. And I basically looked at myself as 'I'm dead now, and I have a year to work my way back to life' "(qtd. in Willenson 55). In combat, " '[d]eath has become so familiar a face it can move about without much stirring' " (qtd. in Laurence 339), and coming home became the main preoccupation with soldiers in Vietnam who counted down the 365 days, or the soldiers on the border who knew how many days they were short of completing a camp or border duty. In guerilla combat, "they were obeying the ultimate truth for all men in war, instinctive reaction that is less choice than imperative, the need to fight or die" (242).

In wars waged not for territory but body counts, and wars that rotated troops in and out constantly, survival became paramount. " The only measure of success was the 'body count,' the pile of enemy slaughtered- a futile standard that made the war as glorious as an abattoir. So homecoming troops were often denounced for bestiality or berated for the defeat – or simply shunned" (Karnow 27). Soldiers walking patrol in Vietnam or Angola/Namibia all experienced this fight to survive: "I'm walking around constantly in fear. And I'm thinking about survival first" (qtd. in Terry 178). The ideologies or propaganda seemed both distant and deficient, as the desire to survive took over. "Each

of us fought for himself and for the men beside him. The only way out of Vietnam, besides death or wounds, was to fight your way out. We fought to live" (Caputo 247). There is a common thread that weaves through all accounts of both Vietnam and the Border Wars – that of survival. In the jungle or in the bush, survival was the common denominator and this became more poignant as the troops became more aware of the lack of support from home. However, the return home for most veterans was where most of the problems began. They were received with apprehension or fear, or just ignored, and this complicated their re-entry into society. When comparing the return home from the Vietnam War to the way South African conscripts were received back home from the border, it is useful to explore this return in terms of recovery, repercussions of combat, re-assimilation and rehabilitation, regret, remembrance, repercussions on the nation, and redemption. Soldiers were made to feel ashamed of both the visible and invisible wounds of an unpopular war, and this lack of support and acceptance at home complicated their already displaced, dislocated combat experience.

In terms of recovery, many soldiers were left in limbo between being fixated on death and perplexed with the life they possessed, having survived. After battle, where they were constantly aware of mortality and the presence of death, soldiers often felt lost when they actually did survive. One soldier explained his survivor's guilt: "To see your friends killed, hear about them being killed, it was... A little piece of you gets killed each time" (qtd. in Santoli 107). Part of the recovery process is discerning exactly what it is that one needs recovery from. It is apparent that " '...it's just terrible to see young men die' " (qtd. in Laurence 710), and surviving combat often requires one to detach oneself entirely from feeling. In addition, recovery can be a truly solitary endeavor, especially in context of the alienating return home for many soldiers. "Between what contact did to you and how tired you got between the farout things you saw or heard and what you personally lost out of all that got blown away, the war made a place for you that was all yours" (Herr 64). Cherishing experiences and memories that are all yours often leads to a very lonely, overwhelming road to recovery. Even family members and friends are outsiders, since they cannot really understand the trauma of combat. Additionally, many veterans

struggled with the fine line between sanity and insanity, since “[i]n the madness of war fighting, insanity could be an asset” (Laurence 377). In combat, insanity was a heralded virtue, yet, back home the soldier is reprimanded, not rewarded for such behavior. This adjustment was impossible for some, and the secrecy and repercussions of combat dictated a soldier’s recovery.

The returning soldier often returns with secrets that he keeps to himself. Not even his fellow soldiers know or hear of some secrets, and certainly not the civilians who snub, ignore or degrade him. Killing and violence are instilled, insisted upon and rewarded in war, and returning home means expectations of a total reversal of violent, programmed behavior. These young men, who were for the most part forced into military service, emerge as efficient killers, or at least, men trained to kill and enact violence. “And they were killers. Of course they were; what would anyone expect them to be? It absorbed them, inhabited them, made them strong in the way that victims are strong...” (Herr 103). These strong but victimized soldiers with secrets cannot simply deprogram themselves like robots – they cannot just forget the effect of combat situations. “They got savaged a lot and softened a lot, their secret brutalized them and darkened them and very often it made them beautiful. It took no age, seasoning or education to make them know exactly where true violence resided” (103). Experiencing the capacity of individual and collective violence up close and personal is one of the major legacies of guerilla warfare that soldiers brought home.

The repercussions of combat have many different names. In WWI, soldiers suffered from shellshock. In Namibia or Angola, soldiers were categorized as ‘bossies’. When “[i]t was rumored that he was completely bossies” (Andrew 42), a soldier would most likely be grappling with myriad malfunctions or struggles of soldiers returning home from combat. At first in Vietnam, “they called it ‘acute environmental reaction,’ but Vietnam has spawned a jargon of such delicate locutions that it’s often impossible to know even remotely the thing being described”(Herr 91). In the early stages of Vietnam,

battle fatigue was the favored term, which encompassed

... simply a series of events which are characterized by a man being under tremendous pressure for a period of time due to the course of the battle, so that his psychological manifestations are very prolonged under this stress. He then, at some time or other during the course of his being in battle, presents [sic] with the symptoms of what we then call battle fatigue. These can be many and varied and we see all sorts of patients coming in with many symptoms... These men usually cannot be talked to. They will not answer you. They will not respond to any type of your questions. (qtd. in Laurence 375-76)

Eventually, shellshock, battle fatigue and acute environmental reaction all came to be termed as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which was a common term to both Vietnam and the Border Wars. One South African conscript encapsulated PTSD:

He saw clear indications that I had become an adrenaline junkie and that all was not well with me on the top floor. Now it would be called post-traumatic stress. In World War-I it was called shell shock. The doctor told me to report to a rest centre that he had established on the peaceful and beautiful bank of the Okavango River where my stress would be 'defused' in pleasant surroundings....
(Breytenbach, *Buffalo* 122)

PTSD is another way of indicating that a person is struggling with the uncharted territory in the aftermath of severe trauma, and in the case of war, combat situations. The soldiers themselves perhaps put forward the best definitions of the repercussions of guerilla warfare: " 'I figure six months in the field should be enough for any man. But when you have to stay out there ten, eleven months, that ain't no good. You'd never be all to yourself afterwards' " (qtd. in Laurence 718). This problem of not being 'all to yourself afterwards' encapsulates all the nightmares, memories, and emotional overload burned into one's consciousness during combat. One war correspondent even likened this state to recovering from a drug addiction: "Maybe you couldn't love the war and hate it inside the same instant, but sometimes those feelings alternated so rapidly that they spun together in a strobic wheel rolling all the way up until you were literally High On War, like it said on all the helmet covers. Coming off a jag like that could really make a mess out of you" (Herr 63).

If many of the young men who served in Vietnam or the Border Wars emerged 'High on War', what is necessary to kick the habit? Once an eighteen-year-old realizes his own capacity for violence, where does all the violence get diffused once he returns home? Many soldiers in Vietnam could not cope with life at home so they re-enlisted for second or even third tours. One soldier admitted during his third tour in Vietnam, "I just can't hack it back in the World" (Herr 5). The process of re-assimilation into society is not as easy as the military apparently saw it. When soldiers finished their required duty, they were sent directly home; there was no debriefing, no down time, and no advice or assimilation protocol. Re-assimilation or reintegration back into civilian life is complicated by many factors, one of which is the outrageous paradox of being a killer or a hero, or feeling proud of surviving combat and feeling like an outcast as a soldier returning from a lost war. "At the same time I was on the Navy's troublemaker list, the Army was commending me for bravery. I found it very difficult to assimilate. How could I be a hero and a goat at the same time?" (qtd. in Santoli 58) Additionally, the lack of support from the military as well as from some family, friends and countrymen back home complicated this reintegration. South African "[c]onscripts described this process of adjusting from military to civilian life as particularly hard, especially since they were just expected to slot back into society, with no debriefing or counseling"(Draper 182-83). For these soldiers, "...*there wasn't a grace period... We just had to fall in and carry on*" and many were aware that "...*there were expectations that we would interact with civilians normally. It was impossible to move out of the danger zone of the border and integrate into normal society*" (qtd. in Draper 183).

Soldiers returning from their tour in Vietnam or border duty in Angola/Namibia, all echo the same desire for debriefing, assistance or counseling before returning into civilian life. The military spent great time, money and manpower programming these young men; surely they could spend some effort or money in de-programming them. A Vietnam veteran claims:

I wish I would have had a barracks to go to or an EOD unit to settle down and relax and talk to people that could listen to me and understand, and then program out of the Army that way. I wish it wouldn't have been so abrupt because it did

fuck me up. Not only was I getting out of a traumatic situation, but I was getting out of a way of life for almost three years. (qtd. in Santoli 78)

South African conscripts experienced the same lack of support from the military upon their return from the border. Similarly, Sean Callaghan, a medic on the border claimed that "... we were basically told to grow up and carry on; there was nothing wrong with us... There was no debriefing. There was no 'what happened to you?' There was no 'this is what you can expect when you go home. This is how you should try and integrate yourself back into society' "(qtd. in TRC 5: 137).

As mentioned earlier in chapter two, South African border duty was different from Vietnam in one way: soldiers were required to do border duty each year for a certain number of years. The other side of the coin is that Vietnam soldiers often faced much more high-intensity combat situations and for a more prolonged duration. South African soldiers were repeatedly pulled back and forth from combat or camp situations to home, year after year; South African conscripts experienced successive stints of reintegration. One conscript explained, "You weren't given any time to adjust. To adapt to Civvy Street again" (PB), 'civvy street' meaning civilian life back home. Another conscript describes the military mentality as viewing the process of re-assimilation as a joke:

I do remember a letter, I think, being sent to our parents with ten points on it, saying something like: 'You had better lock your alcohol and your young girls away because these young boys are coming back home'. But that was the extent of the support we got.

I saw a psychiatrist... He declared me fit for battle and sent me home [saying] that there was nothing wrong with me. (qtd. in TRC 5: 137)

South African conscripts, like Vietnam veterans, wrestled with their post-combat trauma in their own ways; one conscript described how he got through on his own with "no thanks to the SANDF or SADF for helping me" (qtd. in TRC 5: 137). Veterans organized veterans groups or associations, and developed coping skills, individually or together in small groups.

Trying to fit back into a place with different surroundings, code of ethics, and consequences was not a trial that everyone understood. “You only get serious with a really good friend...it’s not macho to talk about things that disturb you. You don’t talk - Cowboys don’t cry. It’s hard for guys” (PB). The constant back and forth for South African conscripts took its toll, and as one conscript explained:

And you may have lost friends, you may have seen some things that you really didn’t need to see. You may have, as what happened to me, spent three months sleeping on the ground, and quite used to it - very quiet air, it was totally still, and then you get home and you’re sleeping on a bed, and you can’t sleep because it’s too soft, and it’s noisy and you can hear the traffic and its too bloody light. Everybody’s snoring around you. So you don’t get a decent night’s sleep and you’re trying to get your act together and if you don’t in a week you’ve got your boss saying ‘you better pull yourself together son. (PB)

Soldiers were forced to come up with their own ways of pulling themselves together, and the solitary task of debriefing oneself is a difficult and unnecessary burden for the public as well as the military to add to a soldier’s trauma. Besides forgetting the deaths of friends, and the nuances of leaving the jungle or bush life, soldiers faced the daunting task of assimilating the discrepancies between what their nation told them they were fighting and the reality of what they actually did:

It’s taken me twelve years – it’ll be thirteen in March – to assimilate the gap between what I thought I would see and what I did see...But what really bothered me were some of the things that I saw that were not compatible with the ideals that I’d been brought up to believe in, in terms of being a member of a military and fighting for a country that heroically helped defeat the Germans and the Japanese and was supposed to be the good guy and all of that. (Caputo 68-69)

Another difficult aspect of reintegrating back to ‘civvy street’ or home was the feeling of alienation, of not being able to relate to fellow countrymen, much less your loved ones. Many veterans still have the feeling of being “on the outside looking in” (qtd. in Terry 127). American and South African society was accustomed to heralding men come home from battles won as heroes but were unsure what to do when their soldiers perceivably ‘lost’ the war. This leads to an important question: why didn’t the politicians, policy makers, government or military shoulder the uneven weight placed on the soldiers?

Instead of classifying the returning soldiers as simply heroes or villains, perhaps it makes more sense "...to recognize them as fairly ordinary men who sometimes performed extraordinary acts in the stress of combat, acts of bravery as well as cruelty" (Caputo 137). Whether or not their sacrifices were seen as having worth in the context of politics, public opinion or an end result, the acknowledgement of the tribulations of the soldiers as individuals should have been automatic, no matter what the outcome of the conflict. But this was not the case in the Vietnam War or the Border War, as a Vietnam veteran highlights the added difficulty of this disapproval: "When I came home, I really got upset about the way my peers would relate to me. They called me a crazy nigger for going to the war. And I was still dealing with Vietnam in my head" (qtd. in Terry 99-100). The topic of the war as well as the soldiers themselves was avoided like a contagious and insidious plague: "When I got back to the real world, it seemed nobody cared that you'd been to Vietnam" (qtd. in Terry 181). The same isolation applied to South African men returning from the border or camps:

It was like a normal thing. For two decades guys had been coming and going and the guys that have come back might be a little bit skew in the head, but everything is dead normal at home. And you just sort of fit into it... You have to. And Vietnam vets came home and not only did they not have the support from home, but they were actively protested against. I mean they had shit. So these guys just locked everything in, that's what he told us, you just lock it in and carry on as if nothing happened. And you get together with your mates and you let your hair down, because they understand. They saw the shit. So they feel that they can only relate to themselves. (PB)

The rehabilitation process was certainly not standard for all soldiers. Each coped – or refused to face coping – with the reality of returning to society after combat in his own way. "Others found the army to be a most jarring and hostile place, and so started using drugs, usually dagga, to insulate themselves and to reduce their pain" (Andrew 98). Alcohol and drugs provided a necessary escape for many from reintegration. These soldiers who used drugs or drank excessively during and after combat, were simply trying to stave off facing the effects of the trauma of combat:

Dope was what you took instead of alcohol or sleeping pills, effectively medicating the nightmares that plagued everyone... With drugs like opium and marijuana, memories of traumas in the field got filed away for later, though none

of us knew how much, or how difficult, later would be... Sometimes drugs took away reality so completely it was possible to forget the war for a while. (Laurence 312)

All accounts of both wars are rife with drug and alcohol use, both during and after combat. Some may argue that during the sixties, drugs were just a part of popular culture, and accepted as more of a norm than before. "The U.S. command in Saigon estimated that sixty-five thousand GIs were on drugs in 1970" (Karnow 631). There were no statistics regarding drug use on the border, but some soldiers make reference to the substance abuse of soldiers. "Of those who were not addicts, three in the ward had attempted suicide. A chap called Buddy and his mate Nicholas had tried to kill themselves by drinking petrol. Piet had tried to hang himself from a washing line in Bloemfontein" (Andrew 99). Unfortunately, rehabilitation of soldiers extended beyond just the physical amputees or visibly handicapped men; many soldiers needed to undergo drug rehabilitation to address the hidden, invisible manifestations of their experiences as soldiers.

The rehabilitation process varied from person to person, but a common aspect of this process involved regret. Soldiers who served and fought in lost wars were forced to regret the lives lost and the sacrifices made. They felt bitter about being embroiled in a lost war, and perhaps being duped by the now seemingly empty ideology. South African soldiers especially felt and still feel added pressure to somehow repent their allegiance to a racist regime: "...I retained a troubling need for someone...to acknowledge what I had done. I use the word troubling because of my acute discomfort at being part of the South African war machine" (Feinstein 146). Similarly, a Vietnam commander admitted, " ' I don't care anymore if I get back to the world,' he said bitterly, ' a world too stupid to stay out of war, too stupid to know how to fight it, too stupid to know how to end it.' "(qtd. in Laurence 389). The sacrifices seemed pointless, and many lives seemed bitterly wasted; that "all those people had died in vain, or that the largest percentage of the American public believed that they died in vain, is very disturbing..." for soldiers to face (Caputo 29-30). The surviving soldiers regret their own service and especially the lost lives of

friends: “I thought about Louis and all the people that didn’t come back. Then people that wasn’t even there tell us the war was worthless. That a man lost his life following orders. It was worthless, they be saying. I really feel used. I feel manipulated. I feel violated” (qtd. in Terry 52). A South African soldier echoed this sense of purposelessness of the war: “I think it was a waste of bloody time - serving up on the border. Fighting what we were supposed to have been fighting for. Being paid to kill people that had absolutely no bearing on South Africa. No. There was absolutely no purpose to it” (PB).

Remembrance is closely intertwined with regret, since even though soldiers regret the futility of lives lost, they still want properly to remember and pay homage to their fallen comrades. One soldier explained that “ ‘The hardest part is trying to forget the deaths of your buddies’ ” (qtd. in Laurence 289). The soldiers who survived and made it back home to America or South Africa have a strong desire to keep the memory of the war and those who died alive in some way. Vietnam veterans finally got a memorial in 1982, but not without much debate or controversy over whether the black shiny marble stuck into the ground was appropriate for the Vietnam War. South African conscripts have never been allowed an official memorial. The most striking aspect of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C. is the recording of all the names of those who lost their lives. For veterans, correctly identifying and naming individuals who lost their lives in the war is one of the most crucial aspects of remembrance. Remembrance is perhaps one of the only things that assuages the regret. The war correspondents that actually moved amongst troops in the Vietnam jungle made a supreme effort to record the details of troops, both dead and alive. Charlie Black, a famous correspondent attached to the First Cavalry Unit insisted upon such details; “[h]e didn’t ask them what they were doing or what they were thinking or anything other than name, rank, age, and hometown” (Laurence 213). The most palpable part of the story of both wars is that of the individuals themselves: “... veterans know firsthand the statistics, the heroism, the evil and the madness. They are the ones qualified to look inside the casket and identify the body for what it is – a dead boy killed in a war, who had a name, a personality, a story all

his own" (Baker xii).

The returning soldier brought the war home, and to many people's dismay, their physical and mental wounds did not conveniently stay behind in Vietnam, Angola or Namibia. The visibly and invisibly wounded soldiers transmuted this violence, pain, regret and loss onto the nation itself. Although many people tried to shove soldiers to the side in order to wipe the war from their consciousness, America and South Africa both incurred severe repercussions from their wars of intervention. First of all, there is the concrete loss, measurable in the lives lost and the many other Americans and South Africans who evaded military duty and chose to live in exile instead. It was not just the regret for fallen friends that disturbed veterans, it was also the effect these deaths had on the nation as a whole: "And with that death and many like his, with each death a little bit of the fiber of what was good in this country was being destroyed. That's what bothered me" (qtd. in Santoli 108). Another pervasive repercussion on the nation was the transference of a collective, communal ghost that haunted the soldiers as well as the American public. "By the end, after all the violence radiating out from the American heart had come back home again to haunt it, the mission could be seen as suicide. Death all around... America's dark orgy of destruction in Vietnam turned and stung itself in the back, poisoning its own body" (Laurence 395-96). Veterans were the visible reminders of that horror come home and they bore the brunt instead of the nation, its government and military taking their own part of the collective responsibility. They were visible and accessible, whereas the constituencies that sent them were not. This inability collectively to integrate the soldiers, or what they represented, into society made the veterans the victims of such uncertainty; "... we had no way to integrate the war or its consequences into our collective and individual consciousness" (Caputo 353-54).

The wars took the measure of the nations involved, not just the measure of the individuals who fought in them. The soldiers were seen as criminals just because they represented a criminal policy – a seemingly reckless American foreign policy or racially motivated

South African interests. Besides the individual soldiers, another casualty of war is the nation's sense of history, or past, and place in the world. For the MK soldiers who fought alongside the MPLA, what constituted home, past or history for them? What about the soldiers who fought under the National Party who now live under ANC rule? What does home mean to them now? The nation who forges war also ends up torn asunder, but in less apparent ways. The United States and South Africa expected to be the victors, but were suddenly seen as the vanquished. A war correspondent succinctly summed up this role reversal: "We came to save the Vietnamese from their enemies and we had become the enemy ourselves" (Laurence 477). The sense of invincibility that once prevailed in both countries to some degree was lost along with the war itself. Americans and South Africans had to reassess their places in history, which were altered by war, and unfortunately the soldiers became the scapegoats for this national endeavor.

Realizing or assuming a collective responsibility as a nation for what occurred in wars on foreign soil is certainly a necessary step forward. Soldiers still struggle with the living memory of a war past – still seek some sort of redemption within the chaos of their war experience. "For enduring seemed to me an act of penance, an inadequate one to be sure, but I felt the need to atone in some way for the deaths I had caused" (Caputo 332). The soldiers surely should not shoulder this penance alone. Remaining silent about the Vietnam War or the Border War does not mean that the repercussions of the wars simply vanish for the returned soldier or his nation. One soldier found strength and redemption in sharing his experience:

People want me to bury it. I can't bury it. I did learn something and I'm not sure what. But I know it's affected me a whole lot. And I think it's in a good way and I think I've really grown from that, because I don't want to see it happen again and I really care about people. To really try to help people to work through the problems of their own. (qtd. in Santoli 260)

There is something redemptive and cathartic about allowing a space for a lost soldier and his individual stories. To learn something as individuals and collectively as nations is a worthy purpose and the soldiers of the Vietnam War and the Border War certainly have many lessons to give. Through acknowledgment and remembrance, assuming

responsibility, and respecting and relating to the soldiers of our lost, undeclared wars, America and South Africa have a priceless opportunity for healing and recovering a renewed and cohesive sense of past or history.

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